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THIRD SERIES.

THE

MYSTERIES

OF THE

COURT OF LONDON.

BY GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS,

AUTHOR OF THE FIRST AND SECOND SERIES OF "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON," "THE DAYS OF HOGARTH," "FAUST," "WAGNER, THE WEHR WOLF," "THE CORAL ISLAND," "THE BRONZE STATUE," "THE SEAMSTRESS," "JOSEPH WILMOT," "MARY PRICE," "ELLEN PERCY," "AGNES, OR BEAUTY AND PLEASURE," "KENNETH," "THE RYE HOUSE PLOT," "THE MASSACRE OF GLENCOE," &c.

WITH FIFTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS.

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THE MYSTERIES

OF

THE COURT OF LONDON.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE SPANIARD.

COUNT CHRISTOVAL was now thirty-five years of age; and though somewhat careworn, yet in other respects his countenance was as prepossessing as on the first day when Elizabeth Paton met him amongst the Catalan hills. He wore his moustache—but his beard and whiskers were closely shaven; and their absence made him seem several years younger than he really was. His dark eyes shone perhaps with a more subdued and melancholy lustre than was their wont ere he had learnt to love the English lady:

but now, as he gazed upon her, they beamed with the light of rapturous joy. The brilliant teeth shone between the half-parting lips; and in this moment of his ineffable delight, the rich warm blood of his trans-Pyrenean nature was mantling through the transparent olive of his complexion. He was dressed as a private gentleman: his apparel was handsome, yet in the best possible taste; and the closely fitting frock-coat displayed the fine symmetry of his tall form to its fullest advantage.

Elizabeth Paton quickly recovered from the startled surprise into which the sudden appearance of Don Diego had thrown her; and with the natural generosity of her heart, she chose to lose sight of the forced prisonage she had endured at his hands, and to think only of the kindness and attention received from himself and his associates in the Catalan hills. But while she extended her hand, she nevertheless assumed a certain degree of reserve in gentle rebuke for the unceremonious manner in which he had burst into her presence. Yet it must be confessed that her mien was not exceedingly reproachful—because strong-minded though she were, she was nevertheless sufficiently a woman to feel that his conduct was most flattering to herself.

Addressing him in the French language, she said, "Don Diego, what brings you to England?"

"Your image!" he replied in the English tongue, at the same time carrying her hand to his lips; and kissing it rapturously ere she could withdraw it, he said, "That image which has never once been absent from my mind since you fled from the tower in the wilds of Catalonia!"

Elizabeth gazed upon him with the utmost astonishment: for he was addressing her in the English language,—spoken too with the utmost accuracy and with but so little of a foreign accent that it was barely perceptible. She knew at the time when she was in Spain he was utterly unacquainted with her native tongue; and she naturally marvelled to perceive that he had acquired it to such perfection.

"I have learnt the English language for your sake," he said, with a deep tenderness of voice and a corresponding look—but both alike mingled with a chivalrous respect, just as he was wont to deport himself towards her during her captivity in Catalonia. "And you asked me wherefore I came to England?" he continued: "need you have put that question? But let me put a question to you—and I beseech and implore you to respond to it at once. Have you ever thought of me with kindness since you fled from Spain?"

"I have thought of you with friendship," replied Elizabeth Paton, seriously but frankly; "and within the last few days, when relating my adventures in Catalonia, I have spoken of you in similar terms."

"Friendship!" murmured Count Christoval mournfully: but with a sudden access of hopefulness, he exclaimed, "Yet may not friendship prove the germ of a more tender feeling? I know you are not married—I have every reason to believe that you do not love another——Indeed, I have been assured that you pride yourself on being unsusceptible of love. O Elizabeth! so bright and beautiful a creature as you—to possess a heart that is unsusceptible of love! No, no—it were impossible! it were an anomaly in human nature!—and I am not without the hope that destiny has reserved for me the happiness of thawing that glacial soul of your's!"

"Don Diego Christoval," answered Elizabeth, still speaking seriously, but with a certain degree of kindness in her accents, as well as with the fullest candour in her looks, "it is my firm belief that I never can regard you with any other sentiment than that of friendship. And now, I appeal to the generosity of your nature, and to every feeling of delicacy which must harbour in such a heart as your's, that you will leave me at once. You mansion where I dwell, is the house of a benefactor—and I dare not stand the chance of suffering in his estimation. He is absent too, at this moment: but my brother is there—and a very dear friend also—there are numerous servants likewise—I am well known in this neighbourhood——In short, every instant that you remain here threatens to compromise me most seriously. What would be thought if I were seen walking here with a stranger?"

"A stranger to those whom you have named," rejoined the Count reproachfully,—"but no stranger to *you!* Will you not accord me a few minutes,—only a few minutes,—while I tell you all that I have thought—all that I have done—and all that I have hoped, during the four years which have elapsed since last I saw you?"

"Well, then—a few minutes," answered Elizabeth: "and only a few minutes," she added impressively; "because I must not be compromised."

"Oh! this coldness—this coldness!" ejaculated the Count vehemently;—"after I have told you that I came to England expressly to search after you! It is more than I can endure! Have pity upon me, Elizabeth—I beseech you to have pity upon me!—for never in this world was a woman the object of a love so devoted as that which my heart cherishes for you. Love!—it is a passion transcending far all that poets ever dreamt or romancists ever depicted in the form of love!—it is a passion which has become so interwoven with the very principles of my existence, that if it be doomed to prolonged disappointment, it will drive me to put an end to my sorrows and perish in the blood of a distracted suicide!"

The Count spoke with a wild impetuosity, mingled with a solemn earnestness, that for the moment overawed Elizabeth Paton, and even made her afraid. Not afraid for herself—for she was a woman who scarcely knew the name of fear; and there was no Catalonian tower at hand to which she might be conveyed, and where she might be retained captive. But she was afraid on account of that man who loved her with an ardour so indubitable—a depth of passion so sincere—and a constancy so well proven, that she felt this menace of suicide to be no idle nor inconsiderate one.

"Count Christoval," she said, giving him her hand—speaking kindly, but with a half-reproachful look,—"it is not generous of you to address me in these terms. Much as I may pity you—deeply as I may compassionate you—and even flattered and honoured as I may feel by this love of your's—yet a woman's heart is not to be won by passionate threats and impetuous outpourings."

"No!—but her heart is to be won by a devoted love," exclaimed the Count: "and all that *I* say—

all that I do—all that I menace, must be taken as evidences of that devoted love on my part. Listen to me—I beseech you to listen! You have promised to accord me a few minutes—and I will endeavour to be calm."

"Proceed," said Elisabeth, withdrawing her hand, which he had pressed tenderly and fervidly between both his own. "Let us not linger near this road where passers-by might chance to observe us: we will walk through that shady avenue, where we shall be unperceived from the mansion. You see, Count Christoval, that I am compelled to take precautions,—that I am fearful of being compromised; and I hope therefore you will have some consideration for me."

"Will you have any for me, Elisabeth?" he asked, gazing upon her countenance with a rapture subdued by mournful suspense. "But let me avail myself of the little leisure you are affording me. I will go back to that time when you fled from the tower in Catalonia. On discovering your flight, a frenzy seized upon my brain; for several hours I was like one demented. It appeared to me as if the world contained naught left that was worth living for: and yet, as heaven is my witness, I took no measures to pursue you, or to bring you back. I had hoped that by my unwearied attentions I should have secured your affections. Your flight was a proof that my fondest anticipations had all been in vain. When I recovered some degree of calmness, it was only to fall into a profound melancholy; and there were moments, during the latter part of that day on which your flight was discovered, when I thought of putting a period to my existence. But the circumstances in which my faithful associates were placed, recalled me to immediate activity. I was reminded that the hour had come when I was to learn the result of the negotiations in respect to the captive son of the military commandant of Catalonia. Those terms were favourable: a ransom-money was paid for his release—and immunity was granted to myself and my band for the ensuing three months. But such a change had come over me that I resolved to abandon immediately the life I was leading. I thought to myself that if I were to follow you to England, whither I felt assured you would repair, I might yet succeed in making an impression upon your heart. I thought that when you were free, and no longer regarded me in the light of a gaoler, you would forget whatsoever injustice you had sustained at my hands: while, on the other hand, you would remember the many proofs of devoted love that I had given you. I took leave of my comrades—I abandoned to them the greater share of the spoils which we had amassed; and they wept as they gave me the farewell embrace. I set out alone towards the Pyrenees, intending to follow you to England. But I had not journeyed many miles, when I was seized with a sudden illness, brought on by the anguish I had suffered on account of your flight. It struck me like a thunderbolt. I fell from my horse, and lay senseless in the depth of a ravine. There I might have perished, had it not been for the kindness of some peasants who chanced to pass that way. They took me to their cottage in the neighbouring hamlet; and there I lay, raving in the delirium of fever for many weeks. When I regained complete consciousness, I was so enfeebled—so attenuated, that I could not leave my couch: and thus some more weeks passed, while I lay stretched prostrate and powerless there. One morning a party of soldiers entered the village; and their commanding officer billetted them upon the inhabitants. This officer was the Captain-General's son, whom I had taken prisoner, and whom you saw at the tower. On going his rounds to see that his men were properly cared for, he came to the cottage where I lay. I was recognised: the three months of safety guaranteed by his father, had more than elapsed—and I was accordingly arrested as a Carlist traitor and as a guerilla bandit. But the young man possessed certain generous feelings; and he did not send me out to be shot like a dog, as he might have done, and as most other of the Christino officers would have done in his place. He forwarded me as a prisoner to Barselona,—at the same time despatching a letter to his father, the Captain-General, beseeching that my life might be spared. This entreaty was not without its effect: but I was sent along with several other Carlist captives to the prison of Cadiz—there to remain until a ship should be in readiness to bear us as felon-exiles to the Phillipine Islands. But it happened that the Governor of Cadiz was a relation of mine: he took compassion on me—and though I myself would ask no favour from the government of Queen Christina's Regency, he adopted measures secretly to procure a mitigation of my sentence. He succeeded—and I was ordered to be retained a prisoner at Cadiz. The same favour was shown to other officers of the Carlist army, who were my fellow-captives. We were treated with much indulgence; and being allowed books, I obtained the means of acquiring the English language. Amongst my fellow-prisoners was an English officer who had served in the Carlist army; and after a while he became my tutor in the study of your native tongue. For, Oh! I was not without the hope of sooner or later recovering my liberty; and I thought—heaven grant that the idea was not vain!—I thought, Elisabeth, that if I could address to you the language of love in those tones and words most familiar to your ear, an impression would be more easily made upon your heart. Am I doomed to be mistaken?"

"Proceed with your narrative, Don Diego," said Elisabeth, in a tone which was slightly tremulous. "Remember that the minutes are speeding by."

"Ah! cruel to remind me that you have limited our present interview to so short a space!" exclaimed Count Christoval,—"I who for years have sustained life by dwelling upon your image! But I will continue. Three years elapsed—and I continued a prisoner at Cadiz. My assiduities in acquiring the English language were unremitting; I had an able tutor—and you may judge whether I made the most of my time, and whether I profited by his lessons. In the summer of 1843 all Spain was convulsed by the civil war raised by Queen Christina's adherents against the Regent Espartero; and in a battle which took place, an uncle of mine—a devoted adherent of Christina—was slain. He died, leaving behind him immense wealth, to which I should have been the legitimate heir, were it not that all I possessed devolved to the Crown, as I was a condemned traitor and an outlaw. Then was it that the kind feeling of the Governor of Cadiz again made itself apparent; and when Spain once more became com-

paratively tranquillized, he exerted all possible interest on my behalf. But matters of this kind drag themselves slowly along in my native country; and it was only a few weeks back that one morning my generous and well-meaning relative brought me the announcement that I had received a full pardon—that my title of Count was restored to me—and that I was allowed to take possession of the large fortune whereof I have spoken. I myself would have asked no favour of those in power: but I was not insane enough to reject the boons which had thus been secretly procured for me. Besides, during my long imprisonment at Cadiz, I had learnt sufficient of the true character of Don Carlos—I had heard so much from my fellow-captives respecting his bigotry, his selfishness, and his narrow-mindedness—that I came to loathe the cause which I had formerly served. But while having been brought to this abhorrence of Carlism, I was not changed into an admirer of the Queen's monarchy. My studies had converted me into a Republican; and on the day that I issued from the prison at Cadiz, I vowed that never again would I draw my sword on behalf of Royalty—but only to aid in emancipating the Spanish people from the thraldom of tyrants, should the opportunity for such redemption ever present itself. Business-affairs, connected with my newly inherited fortune, compelled me to visit Madrid: but no sooner were those matters settled, when I set out on my journey to England. I travelled alone, without ceremony, without attendants: my purpose was to proceed as rapidly as possible, avoiding encumbrances of all kinds. A post-chaise bore me to the Pyrenees. Oh! with what mingled feelings of hope and fear did I enter upon this journey. The mountainous boundary being crossed, I hurried on through France. The nearer I approached to England, the more torturing became my suspense. Sometimes I was buoyed up with enthusiastic hopes: at others I was a prey to the most torturing apprehensions. But all these had I likewise experienced during my captivity at Cadiz. Now, however, as I approached England the dark side of my thoughts grew darker. You might be no more—you might have gone to some far distant clime, without leaving a trace to guide me in the search: or even if you were in your own native land, it might still be impossible to discover you. I reached Dover; and accident led me to take up my temporary quarters at an hotel where you were known. The moment my name was perceived upon the card fastened to my trunk, I became the object of interest with the persons of that establishment. Miss Marshall sought an opportunity of dropping a hint that she knew me—at least by name. Some conversation took place; and you may conceive how great was the tide of enthusiastic joy which was poured into my soul, when I learnt many particulars concerning you. Yes: I learnt that you were alive and well—that you were in reality unmarried—that your heart remained unsusceptible of that passion which was consuming me—and that you had very recently experienced a change in your circumstances of a fortunate description. Miss Marshall spoke of you in the kindest and most friendly terms: she spoke of you indeed with the tender interest of a sister: and I firmly believe, Elizabeth——yes, I am convinced of it—she looked not unfavourably upon me when I confessed to her the object of my visit to England—that I came as a suitor for your hand! That she deemed me thus worthy of espousing her dearest friend—for such you are in her estimation—her conduct towards me showed. She gave me certain information how to discover your residence on my arrival in London—or at least she told me as much as she herself knew at the time upon the subject. I have been to the house which you have recently left—a picturesque little dwelling not far from hence. There I found a female who had been your servant; and she directed me hither. Now, Elizabeth, you know all. My narrative is ended—and my fate is in your hands. You have a word to speak—a word which will either fill me with happiness, or condemn me to despair. I pray you that it may not be spoken inconsiderately or rashly. I come to lay my title and my fortune at your feet. I can give you rank and riches: but what is ten thousand times more valuable—I can give you a heart which never loved before it first became impressed with your image, and can never love another! Now, Elizabeth, solemnly do I conjure you to reflect that the life of a fellow-creature is in your hands!"

"My lord," answered the lady, in a low, soft voice,—and in a voice that was tremulous too,—"if I were to tell you that I am insensible to all these proofs of so much love on your part, I should be something less or something more than woman. I pretend to be neither: and certainly I am not without a feeling of gratitude for this attachment which you have maintained towards me. But would you have me wed where my heart is not won? Count Christoval, I again repeat that this heart of mine cherishes a friendship for you, but knows not the feeling of love——or at least not *now!*"

"What is your decision, Elizabeth?" he asked. "You have not pronounced it. Assuredly you have given me no hope: but you have not consigned me to despair. Perhaps," he added, with a look of mingled bitterness and apprehension, "you regard me as a bandit—and you shrink at the idea of joining your hand to mine?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Miss Paton, a convulsive tremor passing vividly through her entire form: for she felt visibly and keenly at the moment that upon this ground they were at least on an equal footing. "You wrong me——or rather, you do not understand me——no, you cannot! There—take my hand in friendship! It is a proof that I do not shrink from you—that I have no right to do so; but it is not given in love—because I will neither deceive myself nor you by simulating a sentiment which I do not truly and faithfully experience."

There was something wild and full of impetuous emotions in her voice and manner—something strange and impassioned in her whole aspect—as she thus proffered her hand to the Spanish nobleman. He pressed it to his lips:—again and again he covered it with kisses; and it was not withdrawn, because Elizabeth had fallen into a mood of deep abstraction, and knew not rightly that this fair hand of her's was so completely abandoned to him. But suddenly feeling the fervid warmth of those kisses, she withdrew it with an abruptness that both startled and hurt Count Christoval. Yes: his feelings were hurt—his heart was wounded—and he gazed upon her in mingled surprise and reproachfulness. He gazed thus in surprise, because those vehement

emotions which she had displayed, and that sudden singularity of manner, were uppermost in his mind; and he saw that there was something which had thus profoundly agitated her—but which he could not fathom.

"You must leave me now," she said, recovering her wonted composure—or at least a sufficient command over her feelings to appear outwardly composed. "Our interview has already been too long. We must meet again——once again—but only to part for ever," she added tremulously. "I will then endeavour to reason with you against this wild and insensate passion which you have cherished for me——"

"No, no—speak not thus, Elizabeth!" ejaculated Don Christoval. "You have promised me another interview—and in that promise there is hope. I will not insist upon your answer now——I will leave you——Yes I will leave you, in the joyous conviction that I have made some little impression upon your heart——"

"My lord, go not away with that idea!" said Elizabeth, more hurriedly than earnestly: "because—because——"

"Address me not with that cold formality of *my lord*," he exclaimed. "To you I would be Diego—only Diego; and that I shall be so, I now entertain the enthusiastic hope. Oh! it was impossible that such a love as mine could be doomed to disappointment and despair! We will part now, Elizabeth. Tell me when and where we are to meet again. And let it be soon—I conjure you to let it be soon!—for I shall count the hours and the minutes that must elapse until we meet."

"Give me your address, and I will write to you," she replied, after a few moments' consideration, and still there was a tremulousness in her fluid voice.

Count Christoval named an hotel at the West-End of the town; and repeated his fervidly-expressed prayer that the interval ere they met again should not be a long one.

"I will write to you," she said, "as soon as——as soon as——" and still she hesitated—"as soon as I have reflected on all you have told me, Diego——my lord, I mean."

"Then farewell for the present," he exclaimed: and seizing her hand, he once more carried it to his lips.

She did not withdraw it—how could she remain altogether insensible to the manifold proofs of love which his narrative had afforded, and his conduct during this interview corroborated? No: and thus she suffered him once more to retain possession of that hand for nearly a minute.

"Farewell, dearest Elizabeth—farewell for the present!" he repeated: and then hurrying away was soon out of sight.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

ELIZABETH'S REFLECTIONS.

It was seven o'clock in the morning—and Elizabeth Paton was half-reclining in a large arm-chair, in her elegantly furnished chamber at Stamford Manor. She had not as yet commenced her toilet. The luxuriant masses of her long dark hair hung negligently down upon her bare shoulders—those shoulders which were of such polished whiteness, and so symmetrically modelled. She was absorbed in the deepest thought. A book, which she had taken from the table near, was held unregarded in the fair hand on which Count Christoval's lips had been so fervidly pressed on the preceding evening. Her whole attitude—her look—and the complete abandonment of her form to the influence of that reverie, showed a profound and serious communing with her own heart.

Elizabeth Paton was at that moment a splendid model for the study of a painter or a sculptor. That form, if transferred to the canvass in its semi-nudity and with its superb contours, would have seemed to breathe with a real life, notwithstanding the profound pensiveness which the entire figure denoted. If copied in marble, it would have appeared to glow with vital warmth, notwithstanding that the statue would be as motionless as its living original at that moment. Ah! and the poet, too, might have imbibed inspirations from the contemplation of that superb creature, in the bloom of her womanhood, but every lineament of whose countenance and every contour of whose shape retained the virginal freshness of youth. There was a softness now in the eyes that had lately been wont to look penetratingly, almost with a bold hardihood: there was a softness, too, in the expression of that countenance which had previously borrowed somewhat of a masculine aspect from the daring pursuits in which its possessor had engaged. But even had she worn her male apparel at this moment, it were without effect: it would have been lost sight of in that melting softness of the looks—in that deep pensiveness which the whole form betrayed. Yes: her face, inclined downward, and with the eyes fixed upon vacancy—that attitude of complete self-abondonment—her mien and bearing—all were purely feminine now. Her lips were slightly apart: the polished ivory teeth were visible between their coral lines; and that mouth in its ripe redness, with a dewy moisture upon it, appeared not coarse, but borrowed a delicacy from the general expression of the countenance.

Could she regard with indifference the deep and impassioned idolatry of that handsome Spaniard of whom she was now thinking? Could she fail to be moved by the earnest entreaties and the tender prayers which appeared to be still murmuring in her ears, in a voice naturally melodious, but rendered doubly so when breathing the language of love? And as she reviewed her past insensibility to that passion—and in this retrospection associated the image of Count Christoval with her thoughts—could she not arrive at the comprehension of a bygone apathy and a present change? When she was his prisoner,—although experiencing towards him a grateful sense of certain kindnesses, there was nevertheless the true spirit of a woman to shield her against the influence of love—that spirit which, smarting under a sense of wrong, blended with her natural pride, and made her feel that it was not as a prisoner she was to be wooed and won. So much for the indifference of the past. But what of the present? In the natural generosity of her soul she had put from her thoughts all sense of by-gone wrong, when she found Don Diego standing in her presence on the preceding evening. By so doing, she had removed, of her own accord—and yet at

the time unconsciously—the main barrier which had rendered her heart inaccessible to the influence of his adoring affection. Thus they had met in England on far different terms and under very different circumstances from those in which they stood when so many months together in Spain. Had those months been prolonged to years, and had those circumstances continued the same—*she* a captive, and *he* the gaoler—her heart never would have become accessible to the slightest impression which Christoval's assiduities sought to make upon it. But now that they had met on other terms,—*she* in freedom, *he* no longer appearing in the invidious light of a captor—*she* independent to become the arbitress of his fate, *he* confessing that this destiny of his was in her hands,—that impression had been made in an hour which whole months under other circumstances had failed to accomplish. The beauteous bird, imprisoned in a cage, may often be vainly wooed, and coaxed, and encouraged to sing; and thus many weeks and months, and long, long periods pass in the utter silence of its melody: but when freed from its captivity, it will in a moment pour forth the blithe carol of its gushing music—nor in anger for the past, refuse to warble it in the ears of him who had been its gaoler. Like the bird of our metaphor, is often the heart of woman.

And so it was with Elizabeth Paton. On the preceding evening she had persevered in the assurance that she experienced towards Count Christoval naught but friendship, and could feel no love: and she truly thought so when she thus spoke. But each time the assurance was repeated, it was in a less firm voice, and with a gradually growing tremulousness of the accents. The hand, too, which she abandoned to him more than once, was snatched away because she recoiled from the bare idea of manifesting an undue weakness: and yet the fervour of the kisses imprinted thereon, had not failed to touch an electric chord vibrating to the centre of her heart. Moreover, the strong mind of Elisabeth Paton had been destined to enter upon a phase of wild romance: it was not merely entering upon that phase now—it was in the midst of it. Had not Christoval reminded her that *he* had been a bandit? and did not his words suddenly excite the painful—aye, the poignant reminiscence, that *she* had pursued a similar career? What therefore was it now that was engaging her thoughts? what was the strange and fanciful phase of weird-like romance through which her mind was passing? The similarity between that episode in *his* life and that episode in *her* life, appeared to indicate that they were destined for each other—inasmuch as this parity of conditions had seemed to exist for the purpose of abrogating the possibility of reproach from one to the other. Pursuing the train of her reflections, Elizabeth Paton thought to herself that if from the first moment she met Count Christoval in Spain, it was written in the book of destiny that she should become his wife, certain circumstances were requisite to work out that decree. Amongst those circumstances was the imperious necessity which had driven *her* to adopt in England a bandit career, similar to that which *he* had pursued in Spain. By these means was it brought about that they stood upon the same level. *He* had been a bandit, and yet had preserved unimpaired many of the finest, the most chivalrous, and the most magnanimous attributes of man: *she* also had been a bandit, and had preserved the most estimable jewel with which woman is endowed. All these considerations appeared to assimilate their conditions to an extraordinary degree—to fit them for each other—to establish something like a peculiar aptitude in their union in short, to point *him* out as the only man to whom *she* could dare reveal the secret of her career and then accompany him to the altar—and to point *her* out to him as the only woman whom *he* might take as a wife without the fear of always blushing as he met her regards.

From all that we have been saying, the reader may perceive that Elizabeth Paton was rapidly succumbing beneath the influence of that wild worship and ineffable idolatry of which she was the object: she was yielding to that love so impetuous yet so tender—so fervid and yet so delicate, which the Spaniard experienced for her. No wonder that there was this softness in her looks: no wonder that all her traits should once more become unexceptionably feminine. The influence of love was melting whatsoever of masculine hardihood or artificial boldness wherewith her former pursuits and habits had temporarily endowed her. She was becoming a woman—all a woman—once again!

But had she endeavoured to escape from such thoughts as these, that on leaving her couch she had taken up a book and thrown herself in that armchair to read it while waiting the entrance of her maid? Yes: she *had* attempted to divert her mind from dwelling on these new ideas which were rising up within her—stealing into her brain, and gradually diffusing their influence throughout her entire being. On retiring to rest after her interview with Don Diego Christoval, she had been unable to sleep—at least for some hours: she had remained awake, pondering on all that had passed—endeavouring to persuade herself that her heart was not touched—that she was still inaccessible to love. When sleep had at length visited her eyes, the image of the handsome Spaniard appeared to her in her dreams; and these were of a roseate hue. When she awoke again, the bright sun of a cloudless August morning was shining in at the window: she had risen from the couch to avoid the influence of the thoughts of the over-night, and which had been continued in her dreams: she had thrown herself into that armchair—she had taken the book—she had endeavoured to fix her attention upon its pages—but all in vain! Her eyes—those superb dark eyes—were soon gazing upon vacancy: all the powers of her vision were concentrating themselves inward, to dwell with a more earnest look upon the image of Count Christoval: her right arm drooped gradually and languidly—and though her hand still retained the volume, yet it was but mechanically—herself being unconscious that she still held it. And then had ensued that long train of reflections which we have described.

Yes: the reverie was a long one; and at its conclusion, Elizabeth had reached the conviction that Diego and herself were destined for each other, and that she must learn to love him as he already loved her. Ah! when once the meditations of a woman have reached such a point as this, it ceases to be an endeavour to love: it becomes a facility—a necessity—an easy and natural gliding into the experience of the fullness of the heart's passion.

Elisabeth Paton awoke from her reverie: she was startled up by a new thought which had suddenly flashed in unto her mind. Was it that she dreaded to reveal to Count Christoval the one passage in her own life's history which assimilated her condition unto his? No: for this she would reveal to him unreservedly and frankly——aye, and even if necessary, with an eagerness which should prove to him that he need never blush in her presence when retrospecting over the incidents of his own career. What then was it which startled her thus? It was the recollection that she had been married to Villebelle. True, she had surrendered up the documents which she had held in proof of this marriage: but was there not the record thereof in the register at the British Embassy at Paris? True likewise, that the Marquis of Villebelle had married another: but was it not this latter marriage which was void? and was not the former one valid according to the laws of man? And then, too, her father, the Marquis of Eagledean—would he for a moment consent that she should contract another marriage, even though he might approve of the Spanish nobleman as a suitor and forget the worst portion of his antecedents? These reflections were gloomy enough. But suddenly the light of hope flashed in upon them. Had not her father enjoined that she should resume her maiden name of Elisabeth Paton? and in issuing this command, was it not virtually and effectually ignoring that former marriage? Was it not blotting out as much as possible the memory of that mock-ceremony? Yes: it must be conjectured—it must likewise be hoped—that such was the idea which the Marquis of Eagledean had entertained when bidding his newly found daughter resume her maiden name.

Did Elisabeth upon this occasion resolve to fulfil her promise speedily, and write to Count Christoval? No: she determined to wait a few days—to examine still more minutely and deliberately into the condition of her heart. But this was not so easy as she at first fancied. She composed her looks in such a manner that when Alice, her maid, entered the chamber to assist at the morning toilet, she saw not that there was anything peculiar on the part of her mistress; and throughout that day, too, did Elisabeth Paton so bear herself that neither her brother nor Adolphus observed aught unusual or different in her demeanour. The next day it was the same. But all this while there was a rapidly increasing love springing up in the soul of Elisabeth Paton. The spirit had gone forth over the hidden waters of her heart: they had sparkled and bubbled up quickly—the springs of the fountain were opened—and each fresh thought that they engendered gave a new impulse to their flow. Had she been ten years younger, she would have taken as many days—perhaps as many weeks—to comprehend what love was, as now it required hours to endow her with its fullest experience. And thus, during these two days, she felt a growing inclination to accord the handsome Spaniard the promised interview. The third day passed—and the struggle to restrain herself from penning the lines which should bring that interval about, was maintained with a greater difficulty. On the fourth morning she asked herself wherefore she should delay it any longer? and what reason there was why she should not come to a speedy explanation concerning herself with Don Diego, in order that she might be in a position to deliberate for the future? And now arose in her mind the transient fear that Christoval might recoil from her when he learnt that episode in her life which had struck her as so peculiarly assimilating their positions. But no: this apprehension was evanescent indeed—for she knew that the Count's love was potent beyond the exercise of any volition on his part—amounting to an idolatry over the romantic infatuation of which he held not the slightest control!

On this fourth morning, then, she penned a brief note to Don Diego Christoval—to the effect that she would meet him at seven o'clock in the evening at a particular spot, which she described, and which he could not fail to comprehend, as he must have passed that way both coming and returning on the evening of their first interview. Throughout that day Elisabeth preserved the same external calmness as hitherto. She had no fear of being prevented from keeping the appointment by any proposal on the part of Frank or Adolphus to accompany her on an evening walk. For we must here observe that both she and Frank were giving Adolphus lessons on such branches of education as he had experienced no opportunity of pursuing since he was twelve years old, on account of his long captivity from that date of his life, at Beech-Tree Lodge. It was immediately after breakfast that Elisabeth took her turn to instruct him; and in the evening, after dinner, Frank became the friendly tutor. Thus was it that Elisabeth felt assured of being enabled to go forth alone and meet Don Diego Christoval. But did she not reflect that perhaps she was acting in a way of which her father would disapprove? This idea had not escaped her consideration: but she had resolved that the interview about to take place should be the last until the return of the Marquis of Eagledean. Indeed, she sought this interview for the purpose of assuring herself that Christoval would still continue in the same mind towards her after he had learnt the *one* evil episode in her life. It was necessary she should arrive at a certainty on this subject before she made any communication to the Marquis in respect to the appearance of the Spaniard feelings in the neighbourhood, and her own altered towards him.

The spot which she had appointed for the interview, was about half-a-mile from the mansion, and in a somewhat secluded lane. Thither she proceeded at the hour specified: and now her beating heart, her throbbing temples, and the flushing which she felt upon her cheeks, afforded additional evidence: to those she had previously acquired that her feelings had indeed undergone an immense change in respect to Count Christoval.

The moment she appeared in the lane, she beheld him hastening—almost flying, towards her. He approached with anxious looks of suspense, seeking to read upon her countenance the *fiat* of his destiny. Oh! love has a wondrous prescience—a marvellous power of penetration!—an electric spark seems to fly from heart to heart, revealing in a moment as much as it would take minutes or hours for words to make known. Between two hearts that love, and though communicating thus by that material and mystic intuition, there is as rapid an exchange of thought as between the two extremities of the electric telegraph—thus outstripping by an almost

inexplicable agency all other means of reciprocal correspondence.

"Heaven be thanked—I am happy, I am happy!" ejaculated the impassioned Christoval, the moment he was near enough to catch in warm transfusion the first glance of Elizabeth's eyes; and with all the fervid rapture of his enthusiastic nature, he seised her in his arms—he strained her to his wildly throbbing breast.

Nor did she immediately disengage herself from that embrace. She allowed her form to remain enfolded by those arms thus fervidly flung around her: she received upon her lips the impassioned caresses of love: she caught the electric fire—and she gave those kisses back again. But this scene of tenderness—profound, glowing, ineffably delicious—lasted but a few moments; and then, gently withdrawing herself from the embrace of the enraptured Spaniard, Elizabeth said in earnest tones, "Yes, I love thee—I love thee!"

Don Diego Christoval gave no immediate reply—no words escaped his lips—the power of utterance was suspended: but his looks far more eloquently testified to the fervid rapturous joy that filled his heart. Never had he experienced such emotions: he seemed to be in the midst of paradise, but overcome by the intoxicating influence of its fragrance and its beauties. His brain swam round: the delirium was wild and whirling—but delicious beyond all power of description. Elizabeth comprehended the ecstacy which her adorer's heart experienced; and it was an augmentation of her own happiness to feel that she had been the source of such ineffable delight.

"Is it possible—is it indeed possible?" said the Spaniard, his feelings at length breaking the seal which an overpowering bliss had placed upon his lips; "is it a reality? or is it a dream? Oh, it is a joyous reality—it is an ecstatic truth; and at this moment the world contains not a being happier than I. Captivity is now recompensed: anxiety, care, suspensé, and suffering—all are amply rewarded! Dearest, dearest Elizabeth—it is the devotion of all the rest of my life that you have this day ensured unto yourself!"

"My dear Diego," she said, "tranquillise your emotions—let us speak deliberately—for I have much to tell you. Give me your arm, and we will walk here awhile together. I am about to deal frankly and candidly with you: I am about to unfold some circumstances of my life upon which I can only look back with sorrow and regret. But at once understand me——"

"I do already understand you, dearest Elizabeth," he interjected: "for your friend Miss Marshall spoke enthusiastically of the stainless purity of your character as a woman."

"And did she tell you no more?" asked Elizabeth, in a tremulous voice.

"She told me that although you had for some years passed by the name of Mrs. Chandos, yet you might confidently and truly proclaim yourself to be unmarried. Ah! your friend, Miss Marshall, took compassion on my suspense—she sympathised with me in my anxiety to learn all those particulars concerning you, so deeply, deeply interesting to myself!"

"But there is now a revelation," interrupted Elizabeth, "which it behoves me to make without delay. Diego," she continued, looking him full in the face, and yet with a deep blush upon her cheeks and the glitter of uneasiness in her eyes, "what would you think of me if I were to confess that what you have been in Catalonia, have I been in England?"

"Oh! no more of this, my worshipped and adored Elizabeth!" ejaculated the Count in fervid accents. "Had I even found you a lost woman—the most depraved of your sex,—had I discovered you plunged deep down into the slough of shame and self-abandonment,—had I been compelled to seek the vilest den of pollution itself in order to drag you thence,—I should not have continued the less your devoted lover, your constant worshipper! But, as a woman, you are all that a lover can admire or a husband hope to find; and whatsoever misdeeds of another character you may have been driven or led to commit, weigh as naught with me. You love me, Elizabeth—you have given me your heart—you will become my wife—and my happiness is incapable of diminution!"

"Thanks—a thousand thanks, dearest Diego," murmured Elizabeth, "for this assurance:"—and throwing her arms about his neck, she embraced him tenderly of her own accord.

They walked together for half-an-hour, during which Elizabeth represented to the Count that she was under such immense obligations to her benefactor Mr. Gunthorpe, that she dared take no farther step in respect to her love for Christoval until that gentleman returned from Wales. She thought it better at present not to reveal the secret of Mr. Gunthorpe's high rank, and of the close affinity which subsisted between him and her: for the Marquis had enjoined the strictest secrecy on that subject, and his daughter would not violate it, even to that man from whom, if she were the complete mistress of her actions, she would have withheld not a single incident or thought.

"Mr. Gunthorpe's absence," she proceeded to observe, "will not be very long—because I know that he has a particular appointment to keep in London with a young friend of his, a certain Mr. Deveril, for the 20th or 21st of this month. But if, by any accident his absence should be prolonged even until then, I will write to him—I will tell him everything—how you have sought me in England—how my heart has been so suddenly filled with a devoted love towards you; and I will beseech him to give his permission that you may visit at the mansion. But in the interval we must see each other no more."

"No more? and for many days!" said Count Christoval in melancholy accents. "Do not be thus cruel, my beloved one, after having infused so much happiness into my heart!"

"It must be as I have said, Diego," she replied, earnestly and entreatingly. "You would not injure me with my benefactor—you would not encourage me to disobedience? No: it is an additional proof of your love which I now demand. Rest assured that the strength of mine will not be impaired by this temporary separation. Will you not agree to my proposal?"—and as she thus spoke, Elizabeth pressed his hand, gazing at the same time beseechingly and tenderly upon him.

"I will do all that you require," he answered, giving back that look of fondness. "But our separ-

ation must not last for many days: it would become insupportable for me! You promise, dear Elizabeth, that I shall not be doomed to a long absence from you?"

"Judge my feelings by your own," she replied. "And now, dearest Diego, we must separate."

"Farewell, my own well-beloved!" he exclaimed, once more folding her in his arms: "farewell, farewell—and remember that I shall endure with a cruel impatience the interval that is to elapse ere we meet again."

They separated—and Elizabeth Paton retraced her way slowly to the mansion, feeling the warmth of her lover's kisses still upon her lips and cheeks, and the pressure of his arm around her waist. Her heart, too, was filled with indescribable emotions of happiness and joy; and she murmured to herself, "Now I can discourse with Frank upon the delicious sensations of love!"

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE RETREAT IN WALES.

In the vicinity of Rhavadergwy—a town in Wales—stood a small but pleasing residence, in one of the

most picturesque parts of Radnorshire. The site of this habitation was upon an eminence: and a beautiful garden sloped gently down to a purling rivulet which formed its boundary. In the rear of the house there was a paddock, in which the deer disported gaily, and where the swans floated upon a large piece of artificial water.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, that the Marquis of Eagledean, having walked forth from Rhavadergwy, where he arrived on the previous evening, approached this dwelling of which we have just spoken. His countenance expressed a mingled anxiety and seriousness. More than sixteen years had elapsed since he had seen Lady Everton; and he was now about to present himself before her. He had learnt in the town that she lived in an almost total seclusion—that she was exceedingly charitable and devout—but that it was generally reported and believed in the neighbourhood that her reason was affected. The Marquis had not chosen to appear too minute in his inquiries; and therefore beyond these few particulars he had learnt little or nothing.

On reaching the vicinage of the habitation, he stopped short at a distance of about fifty yards, and gazed upon it with the feeling we have above described,—a feeling of mingled seriousness and anxiety. Yes: upwards of sixteen years had elapsed since he had seen her—and she was then thirty years of age. She must therefore be now forty-six. Must not an immense change have been accomplished during this interval in her personal appearance?—a change too all the more remarkable and all the greater, because it was not the lapse of years alone that would have effected it—care and sorrow would have combined to accomplish the work. There was something profoundly sad—something indeed solemnly awful in the thought, that perhaps in a few minutes he would at a single glance be enabled to observe the full extent of that change, and to perceive how powerful had been the ravages of time and the desolating influences of affliction. And then—as he stood thus meditating—back to the mind of the Marquis of Eagledean came the image of Alexandrina as she was when he had last seen her. *Then* she was in all the glorious beauty of womanhood,—perfectly resembling that portrait which he had so recently seen in his daughter Elizabeth's possession, and which was engraved from an original painted in 1828, when she was in her thirtieth year. *Then* her countenance was of a perfectly oval-shape, with a forehead of noble height—a forehead, too, fair and pure as the chastest marble of Paros: and the splendid face was wont to be framed with a perfect cloud of raven tresses showering upon her superb shoulders and upon her back. *Then* the darkly pencilled brows threw out in lovelier contrast the purity of those temples on the opals of which they were set; and the long ebon fringes of the eyes mitigated without subduing the lustre of the magnificent orbs themselves. *Then*, too, the lips from which his own had so often culled ecstatic but guilty kisses, were full and of the richest redness; and the low-bodied dress, which she was wont to wear in compliance with the fashion of the age, afforded a glimpse of the well-proportioned bust. Such was the bright and beautiful image which was conjured up to the memory of the Marquis of Eagledean—the image of her who had possessed his first and only love—the love of an entire life! And as he reflected upon this image, and thought how time and affliction might have marred those lovely lineaments, removing their possessor prematurely old,—the tears trickled down the nobleman's cheeks; and he wept—Oh! he wept as convulsively as a child!

And was not *he* too changed? Would even the penetrating eyes of love,—if love she still cherished towards him—be enabled to discern in his altered person one single lineament to remind her of the handsome and courtly individual who had been the object of her worship in by-gone years? The Marquis indeed felt that the meeting which was about to take place, would be under very painful circumstances.

Wiping away the tears from his cheeks, and subduing his emotions as well as he was able, Lord Eagledean advanced a little nearer to the dwelling and reached a hedge-row that bordered the garden on the side skirting the road along which he was walking. In a few moments he beheld a lady descending the steps of the front-door. She came forth slowly—looking neither to the right nor to the left—but with her eyes bent downward, as if in deepest thought. She was dressed in black; and a sable veil was thrown over her head—but not so as to conceal her features. From the point where the Marquis suddenly halted on perceiving her, he could not obtain even the slightest glimpse of that countenance; and yet he felt convinced that this was the Alexandrina of his enduring and faithful love! Yes—the figure was exactly of her stature: it was not bowed by years—it was still upright as in her youthful days he had known it to be. But it was from an intuitive presentiment rather than from actual observation, that he experienced the conviction that this was she whom he sought.

He remained where he was concealed behind the hedge, hoping that she would approach near enough on the other side for him to observe her attentively and well, so that whatever shock might be destined for him from her altered appearance should have passed away ere he revealed himself to her. Descending the steps, she traversed a large grass plat in front of the mansion—and then slowly entered the gravel-walk which ran behind the hedge. Her steps were deliberate: she advanced like one who was all the time absorbed in profound thought, and who took no notice of the trees, the flowers, and the natural beauties by which she was surrounded. The sun was powerful—and she drew her veil completely over her countenance: so that as she approached nearer to the spot where Lord Eagledean stood, he could obtain no glimpse of those features on which he yearned to gaze again. But her figure was little impaired by the lapse of time: it was not emaciated—it was not reduced to leanness—on the contrary, it presented all the fine contours of a more youthful period. Could this lady indeed be she whom he had come to visit?

She passed by on the other side of the verdant barrier; and the Marquis strained his eyes to penetrate also through the thick folds of the veil: but the attempt was vain—he could not catch the slightest glimpse of the countenance thus hidden. She proceeded on towards the lower part of the garden; and Lord Eagledean continued his way to the gate which afforded admittance to the grounds.

He opened it—he entered the garden—and then he hesitated whether to go and accost that lady, or whether to advance up to the house at once and make the usual inquiry which a visitor would put. At that moment a domestic, in a plain dark livery, appeared upon the steps: he was an old man, and one who might at once be set down as being a faithful dependant of long standing in his present service. The Marquis accosted him, and said, "I wish to see Lady Everton: is that her ladyship walking yonder in the garden?"

"It is, sir," responded the old servant: "but her ladyship receives no visitors. All matters of business must be conducted through Mrs. Jameson——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Lord Eagledean: for he remembered that this was the friendly housekeeper at Everton Park, who had been admitted into the confidence of her mistress in respect to the birth of the two children. "But I have some very particular intelligence to communicate."

"If so, sir," observed the footman, "there will be no harm in your introducing yourself to her ladyship: she can but refer you, if necessary, to Mrs. Jameson."

The old man spoke courteously—even benevolently; and the Marquis of Eagledean, thus encouraged, was about to hasten away towards the extremity of the garden—when it suddenly occurred to him that if Alexandrina should chance to recognize him at once, a scene might possibly ensue which she would afterwards deeply regret and wish to have been avoided. He accordingly turned back again towards the footman,—saying, "All things considered, it would perhaps be better that I should see Mrs. Jameson first."

The domestic bowed, and led the way through a hall, up a staircase, to a room where an old woman with hair as white as snow was seated, occupied with her knitting. She was dressed in black; and in her look benevolence was mingled with sadness. She was not so much altered but that the Marquis would have recognised her, even if he had not been informed who she was.

"Mrs. Jameson, a gentleman wishes to see you on some business connected with her ladyship;"—and having placed a chair for the accommodation of the Marquis, the old footman withdrew from the apartment.

Lord Eagledean sat down, and did not immediately speak—for he saw that Mrs. Jameson's looks had been at once earnestly fixed upon him. They grew more searching: the expression of her countenance showed that memory was doing its work faithfully, and that he would be recognised by her. Ah! then if *she* were thus enabled to penetrate through the change and alteration which years had effected in him, how much more easily would Lady Everton have done so! and how prudent was the precaution he had thus taken in seeing Mrs. Jameson first!

"My lord, my lord," said the old woman, trembling from head to foot with the violence of her emotions, "I know you—I recognise you! What brings you hither?"

"Need you ask?" inquired the Marquis: "can you not conjecture?"

"But your wife, my lord—the Marchioness of Eagledean," interrupted Mrs. Jameson,—"is she not still alive? is she no more?"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the nobleman: for these words struck him as a revelation, instantaneously making known to his comprehension some new phase in the villany of Mr. Everton. "My wife—the Marchioness of Eagledean——I never was married!"

A cry of mingled joy and astonishment burst forth from the aged housekeeper's lips, as she started up from her chair: then fixing her looks earnestly and penetratingly upon the Marquis, she said, "My lord, I adjure you by everything you deem solemn and holy, to proclaim the truth, whatsoever it may be!"

"I have already proclaimed it," he replied, profoundly agitated. "I am incapable of deceit. I never have been married——No: never, never has the image of your mistress been absent from this heart of mine!"

"Oh what misery—what long years of misery, wretchedness, and woe might have been spared to my poor mistress, had she known the truth!"—and as Mrs. Jameson spoke, she resumed her seat, wringing her hands, while tears trickled down the countenance that was furrowed with age.

"The blackest iniquities have been perpetrated," said the Marquis with bitter vehemence: "but until this moment I did not even suspect their fullest extent. And now let me hasten to ask you a question——Does Lady Everton know that her son Adolphus is yet alive?"

Mrs. Jameson gave a wild stare—and then sinking back in the chair, gazed in speechless astonishment upon the Marquis of Eagledean. She evidently knew not what to think: and by the expression of her countenance it was apparent that she feared his reason was unsettled.

"No, my good woman—faithful dependant of your mistress that I am sure you have been—I am not deceived—I am not deceiving you! It is another truth that I proclaim—Adolphus lives—and what is more, his rights are acknowledged! Yes—his villanous uncle has abandoned the title and estates which he had usurped!"

"Then, may God be thanked!" said the old woman in a tone of the profoundest piety. "There may yet be happiness in this world for my poor mistress:"—and having thus spoken, she clasped her hands together—raised her venerable countenance—and the prayer of thanksgiving, which she said inwardly, wavered upon her thin lips.

"I see that we have much to talk about—many things to converse upon," resumed the Marquis, after a pause, "ere the intelligence be broken to your mistress that her son is alive and that I am within these walls. In a few words let me likewise explain to you that our two children Elizabeth and Frank are well and happy. They are beneath my roof in the neighbourhood of London——But again you survey me with the deepest amazement?"

"Because, my lord, it has this moment become *your* turn," replied Mrs. Jameson, "to reveal another phase in that scheme of villany which has been practised towards my poor mistress. Four years have elapsed since she was assured in a letter from her brother-in-law, that poor Frank was no more—and that Elizabeth, having inherited *his* fortune according to the terms of your lordship's trust-deed, was dissipating it rapidly, as she had already dis-

sipated her own, amongst the profligate and dissolute."

"All false—abominably, atrociously false!" ejaculated the Marquis, springing up from his chair, and beginning to pace the apartment in a terrible state of excitement and rage. "Oh, the monsters to whom the welfare of these dear children was entrusted!—Oh, that miscreant Everton! Shall they, after all, be suffered to escape condign punishment? or shall not a terrific vengeance alight upon their heads? But no, no: there are a thousand considerations——I must calm myself—I must compose these wildly agitated feelings of mine!"

Thus speaking, Lord Eagledean resumed his seat; and giving his hand to Mrs. Jameson, he said in an altered voice—a voice full of solemn emotion,—"You have been a kind and faithful friend to your mistress: accept my heartfelt gratitude!"

"Oh, my lord," she replied, the tears still streaming down her cheeks, "you know not what happiness you have imparted to my soul! And what happiness, too, is now in store for her ladyship! But let us hasten to discourse on those subjects which require mutual explanation; for I long—Oh, I long to be enabled to go and commence breaking to my dear mistress all the joyous intelligence that I shall have to impart!"

"In respect to my beloved children Elizabeth and Frank," said the Marquis, "I need not tell you that now they are under my care, they are amply and richly provided for: but the fortunes that I settled upon them upwards of sixteen years ago, have been self-appropriated by those villains Petersfield and Marston."

"Heavens, her ladyship's own brother!" ejaculated the housekeeper. "And it is false, then, that Elizabeth has led an evil life—that she ran away from her husband the Marquis of Villebelle, with a paramour——"

"All false—all diabolically false!" exclaimed the Marquis: then, in a graver tone, he added, "It is my firm conviction that no female in the land can boast herself more pure, more chaste, than my daughter Elizabeth. I have not time now to enter into details: suffice it for me to tell you that her marriage with the Marquis of Villebelle was a mockery—a marriage into which she was coerced by the villain Marston—a marriage that was never consummated, and one which would not hold good according to the English law. As for Frank, Lord Petersfield procured him a situation—a menial one, at Court. It was so easy for a peer of the realm thus to dispose of a youth whom he had basely plundered! But little did he imagine that poor Frank's memory would be so good in recognising those whom he had seen in his earlier years. One day, two ladies whom he had met in the company of his mother at Everton Park, and also at St. James's, appeared at Court together. I know not who they could have been——"

"Lady Hesketh and her beautiful cousin Miss Villiers," remarked Mrs. Jameson. "They must have been the two ladies to whom your lordship alludes. I will tell your lordship presently how they came to be acquainted with Lady Everton's secret."

"Well," continued the Marquis of Eagledean, "as I was saying, Frank recognised that Lady Hesketh whom you have named, and her beautiful cousin Miss Villiers, when they appeared at Court together. But although he thus recognised them, he knew not their names. They, as a matter of prudence, denied that they were acquainted with him—denied indeed that they knew who he was, or had ever seen him before. Doubtless the report of his death had not reached their ears; or else they would have seemed still more surprised. But certain it is that soon afterwards Lord Petersfield thought it better to have Frank removed from a place where he might meet them again; and he accordingly transferred him to the service of Lady Saxondale, at whose mansion he was no doubt well aware that Lady Hesketh and Miss Villiers did not visit."

"Oh, what a ramification of treachery!" cried Mrs. Jameson, holding up her hands in astonishment and dismay. "Years have elapsed since any communication took place between these ladies and my mistress: for when Lady Everton resolved upon retiring to this seclusion in Wales, she broke off all her past friendships—resigned all her previous acquaintances!"

"And therefore," observed the Marquis, "Lord Petersfield entertained little fear that your poor mistress would learn from Lady Hesketh or Miss Villiers that her son Frank was really alive and had been seen in a menial capacity at the Palace. But now, Mrs. Jameson, have the goodness to explain to me those matters concerning which I am yet in the dark,—all that occurred, in short, from the time that I quitted England in the year 1828."

"I will, my lord," responded the old housekeeper: "but it shall be as succinctly as I can—for I am sure that you are impatient to have speech of her ladyship."

"Yes," replied Lord Eagledean: "but ere we meet, I would rather be acquainted with everything—so that she may be spared the pain of having any explanations to give.'

"Your lordship can well understand," resumed Mrs. Jameson, "that the knowledge of my poor lady's secret put her completely in the power of that bad man her brother-in-law. He came and gave his orders at the Park just as if he were the master. He represented to my poor mistress that after all he had learnt, she was not a fit and proper person to have full charge of her son Adolphus during the father's absence. He removed Adolphus to the western extremity of the building,—lodging him in apartments to which there was a communication by means of the private staircase. He introduced creatures of his own to surround the boy—to attend upon him—and doubtless to keep watch over him also. As the time approached for my lord's arrival from India, Mr. Everton sent up all the old servants of the Park to the town-house in London, for the purpose, as he said, of making the fullest preparations there to receive his lordship. I was packed off along with the rest; and Everton Park was left in the hands of the strange domestics whom Mr. Everton had planted there. I went away with a heavy heart—for I suspected some mischief: but I was relieved to a certain extent when I found that Mr. Everton himself was about to proceed to London and pass a few days at his own house. I will now describe what took place at the Park after I and my fellow-servants had removed to the town-residence; although I did not learn the full particulars from my mistress's lips

until some time later. It appears that several days elapsed, during which her brother-in-law being absent, she was permitted to enjoy more of the society of Adolphus than she had previously been. But one day she was taken seriously ill. I must tell you that Mr. Everton had located a medical man at the Park, under pretence of watching over the health of Adolphus. My poor lady has often declared to me her conviction that she was taken so seriously ill in consequence of some medicine which that surgeon had persisted in prescribing for herself. Certain it is that she fell into a complete state of stupor—a lethargy which rendered her unconscious of all that was passing around her. In this condition she remained nearly a week; and when she came to herself, it was only to learn the dreadful intelligence that Adolphus had been taken ill on the same day as herself—just one week back—and that he had died during the night. Indeed, the funeral was to take place on that very same day on which my poor mistress recovered her senses. Her anguish was ineffable: it *must* have been so—and in the wildness of her despair, as she afterwards told me, she plainly and openly accused her brother-in-law, who in the meantime had returned to the Park, of making away with his nephew. He rejected the accusation with an indignant burst of passion, which seemed so natural that it made her ladyship regret she should have advanced such a charge. The medical man was there to corroborate Mr. Everton's denial of the wickedness; and for the time being the poor lady's dark suspicions were lulled, or perhaps absorbed in the bitterness of her grief. She had not the satisfaction, as she subsequently observed to me, of contemplating her dear child's remains: for they were already, as was represented to her, locked up in the coffin which was about to be borne away to the tomb. She was however conveyed by her female dependants to the chamber of death: and she wept scalding tears over the coffin. She was borne back to her own room in a state of unconsciousness—fever supervened—and she remained delirious for several days. When convalescent, her brother-in-law remonstrated with her for the infamous charge she had levelled against him; and while again indignantly repudiating it, he bade her observe that it was an ungrateful recompense for his kind forbearance in keeping the secret of her amour with your lordship. My poor lady fancied she beheld a threat in this intimation; and though her suspicions in respect to poor Adolphus's death revived somewhat in her bosom, she felt herself so completely in the power of her brother-in-law that she dared not give utterance to another word."

"The earth contains no miscreant greater than that brother-in-law!" interjected the Marquis of Eagledean. "Mrs. Jameson, all these arrangements which he made at the Park, and which you have described,—the surrounding Adolphus with his own creatures — the introduction of a medical man, doubtless well bribed to his interests—the sending away of yourself and the other faithful servants of the household—and the administration of some medicament which paralysed her ladyship for a whole week,—all these things were done to enable him to carry out his diabolical design! For the corpse of a pauper boy was secretly conveyed into the house by night—while Adolphus was borne away to Beech-Tree Lodge,—a place possessed by Mr. Everton in the village of Hornsey, and where poor Adolphus remained sixteen years in captivity!"

Mrs. Jameson was horrified at this statement; and some minutes elapsed ere she could resume her narrative. But at length she continued thus:—

"As soon as my poor mistress was again convalescent, she hastened to London to be at the town-mansion when her husband should arrive from India: and then it was she told me of all that had taken place at the Park. Of course the tidings of Adolphus's death had already reached us in London; and I can assure you that heads were gloomily shaken, suspicious looks exchanged, and dark misgivings murmuringly whispered amongst us all. But what could we say? what could we do?—and I, who was most in her ladyship's secrets, knew how completely she was in the power of her brother-in-law! Well, the General returned from India. Oh! how altered he was. He never was of prepossessing appearance: but he came back looking like a wretched old man—with broken constitution and shattered health, all sacrificed at the shrine of his ambition! It was a hard task for my poor lady to maintain anything like composure when he conversed with her upon her pursuits during the years of his absence. He was much cut up by hearing of the death of his son,—which intelligence, I should observe, had reached him the instant he set foot in England, and therefore previous to his arrival in London. In one sense it was fortunate that her ladyship had an excuse for her affliction and her tears: inasmuch as her grief constituted a mask to veil from her husband's eyes the confusion and the remorse she felt at encountering him again. A few months afterwards he died. There was no foul play in his case: he was hovering on the verge of the tomb when he arrived in England. His brother then assumed the title and took possession of the estates,—her ladyship having only a jointure of three thousand a-year."

"And were you aware," asked Lord Eagledean, "that at the expiration of twelve months from his lordship's death, I wrote from Germany to your poor mistress?"

"Yes, my lord—I am approaching that subject now. Her brother-in-law, who had become Lord Everton, doubtless expected that you would take some such step as that—and of course, from all you have told me, it by no means suited him that you should return to England."

"No—because he might have been well aware that if I became the husband of your mistress, I should institute a strict inquiry into the circumstances of Adolphus's death. And moreover," continued the Marquis of Eagledean, "there can be no doubt that he had already come to an understanding with his sister-in-law's brother, Sir John Marston,—that while he was to do what he thought fit to obtain the title and estates of Everton, Marston and Petersfield might on their side look upon the fortunes of Elizabeth and Frank as their own booty. But proceed, Mrs. Jameson."

"Well, my lord, I was going to observe," continued the old housekeeper, "that my lady's brother-in-law was on the look-out either for your return to England, or else for the arrival of letters from you. A letter did come—and he intercepted it. When he had read it, he took it to my mistress,

whom he allowed, or rather compelled to reside at the Park. She was in a bad state of health—deeply desponding—and with a mind painfully attenuated. In such a condition it was not a very difficult task for him to coerce her into a particular course of action: her reputation was in his hands—he could shatter her fair fame at any moment, as if it were brittle glass! He compelled her to write back a particular style of answer to yourself; and he knew from what you had previously written, that it would prove conclusive—for you had left my dear mistress to decide upon your fate. No reply came: or if you ever wrote again, the letters reached not my mistress."

"I never wrote again," observed the Marquis of Eagledean. "I retired to Italy—adopted an assumed name—and dwelt in retirement."

"My lady's brother-in-law," continued the housekeeper, "appeared now to feel more assured of his own position: he no doubt concluded that all apprehensions which had arisen on your account, were fully disposed of. Time wore on—and her ladyship became more her own mistress: she was gradually relieved from the species of restraint which her brother-in-law had put upon her. Sometimes she went to stay with the Princess Sophia at St. James's Palace: but generally she dwelt at the Park. She felt dull and lonely; and she invited Miss Dalrymple and Miss Villiers to stay with her. These two young ladies were cousins—they were orphans too, and totally dependent upon distant relatives, whom they did not love. It was therefore a pleasure to them to experience the friendship of my poor mistress—while on the other hand it was a pleasure to her to have them with her. They became her bosom-friends. It was in the year 1833 that her ladyship inquired of her brother Sir John Marston, whether any tidings had been heard of your lordship. The reply was in the negative: but doubtless Sir John informed Lord Everton——or *Mr. Everton* as he all along ought to have been called——that such an inquiry had been made. That bad man, naturally trembling lest his sister-in-law's affection for your lordship was as strong as ever, and might lead to the revival of a correspondence between you, paid a visit soon afterwards to the Park, and displayed a letter which he purported to have received from some place on the Continent, and which letter contained an account of your lordship's marriage."

"A base fabrication—a vile forgery!" interjected the Marquis of Eagledean.

"Alas! we knew it not at the time: and the intelligence," continued Mrs. Jameson, "struck my poor mistress as with a death-blow. It destroyed a hope—the last hope which she had all along cherished: namely, that you would still return. She became dangerously ill: once more did delirium seize upon her—and one evening in her ravings she betrayed her secret to Miss Dalrymple and Miss Villiers. But they were kind-hearted, generous-minded girls—the elder not more than twenty-one at that time, the other two years younger; and they deeply sympathised with their friend and benefactress. As she got better, she experienced a deep yearning to see her children; and they were accordingly brought by Mrs. Burnaby to the Park. This was with the consent of her brother-in-law—but only on the condition that immediately afterwards Elizabeth should be removed from the care of Mrs. Burnaby and sent to a boarding-school."

"The better," observed the Marquis of Eagledean, "to enable Petersfield and Marston to work out their ulterior designs. But pray proceed."

"My narrative is drawing towards an end," said Mrs. Jameson. "A year afterwards my poor mistress was on a visit to the Princess Sophia at St. James's Palace. Lord Petersfield presided over the Princess's household: and by his permission her ladyship was allowed to see her little Frank again. About ten months after that, Mrs. Burnaby died. Then Lord Petersfield decided upon sending Frank to the same school at Southampton where his sister Elizabeth had already been two years. But before he was conducted thither, Lady Everton begged that she might see him. Lord Petersfield declared that it must be for the last time, as the boy was getting too old to permit these occasional interviews to be continued with any safety to her ladyship's secret. His lordship brought Frank to the Park—and then took him to Southampton. Shortly after this incident Miss Dalrymple became the wife of Sir Albert Hesketh; and her cousin Miss Villiers went to reside permanently with her. Lady Everton now resolved to carry into execution a plan which she had some time back conceived: namely, that of retiring from the world. All her hopes of happiness in this life were dead within her; she believed your lordship married to another—she had seen her children, as she thought, for the last time—and for their future welfare she had little apprehension, knowing how bounteously your lordship had provided for them, and never entertaining the most distant apprehension that Lord Petersfield and her brother Sir John Marston could play those children false. When her determination of retiring to some remote seclusion was communicated first of all to Sir John, he exhibited an appearance of the most affectionate zeal in volunteering to find her a suitable dwelling; and her brother-in-law also testified a semblance of the kindest consideration, by offering to purchase and make over to her whatsoever retreat Sir John Marston might decide upon. In the course of a few weeks her ladyship was informed that a sweet little domain in Wales had been found and purchased for her use."

"Yes—those villains," exclaimed the Marquis of Eagledean, "were all too glad to get her into quarters as remote as possible!"

"It was at the close of the year 1834,—some months after Mrs. Burnaby's death, and after that last interview with little Frank,—that her ladyship came down into Wales. She brought with her six of the oldest and most faithful domestics belonging to her household, in addition to myself. Arrangements were made with her brother-in-law for the payment of her jointure through Messrs. Marlow and Malton, Solicitors of Parliament Street, Westminster."

"And they were doubtless instructed by the brother-in-law," observed the Marquis, "not to give her ladyship's address to anybody."

"My poor mistress herself," continued the housekeeper, "determined, on retiring from the world, to break off all correspondence with her former friends and acquaintances. She wished to separate herself as much as she could from the past, in order that the future years of her life might flow on as tran-

quilly and as uninterruptedly as possible. The only subject on which she sought occasional information from her brother and brother-in-law, was the welfare of her children. Years passed on. In 1839, Elisabeth being then of age, her ladyship received the intelligence that she had married the Marquis of Villebelle; and it was a source of gratification to her to find that *one* wish she had formally expressed was thus fulfilled by the bestowal of a noble name upon her daughter. But some time afterwards she was plunged into affliction by the intelligence that this daughter had separated from her husband and was living irregularly. Then came the news of Frank's death——"

"All done," interjected the Marquis, "for the purpose of stifling her future inquiries relative to her children, by making her believe that one was dead and the other unworthy her consideration. And now tell me, Mrs. Jameson, in what frame of mind her ladyship's existence has been passed."

"With the exception of those two causes for deep affliction—and which, thank heaven, in a few minutes will be dispelled—her ladyship has experienced a degree of mental tranquillity which, if not altogether natural, has at least saved her health and her person likewise from the ravages of a bitter anguish. I do not think, my lord, that the tone of her mind *has been* altogether natural: it may be described as a calmness both death-like and glacial;—it has preserved her from excitement and irritability—but I fear that if Providence had not sent you hither now, with all these happy tidings, she would gradually sink down into idiotic apathy. She seldom speaks; and when she does, it is with a strange coldness,—a coldness that it does one harm to feel the influence of. She seldom reads and never works: but she either sits in the drawing-room gazing from the window—or else wanders in the garden, or about the neighbourhood, in a kind of dull listless mood. Nevertheless, there are moments of activity with her; and these are when dispensing her charities: for her jointure is far more than suffices for the maintenance of the establishment in this part of the country where everything is so cheap; and she expends large sums in doing good. Her benevolence has rendered her an universal favourite as well as an object of great interest; but I believe that most persons in the district fancy the poor lady is not altogether right in her intellects. Alas! they know not her story as you and I know it, my lord——But I think that we have no need for farther discourse—and certainly no necessity for dwelling upon mournful topics. Shall I go and prepare her ladyship to see you? shall I break to her the intelligence that her son Adolphus lives—that Frank also lives—and that Elisabeth is worthy of her love?"

"Yes—go—go quickly, my good woman," said the Marquis of Eagledean, all his agitation reviving at the thought that in a few minutes he would again behold the countenance of her whom he had loved for upwards of thirty years.

"I go, my lord," replied Mrs. Jameson, cheerfully. "But one word more. What may I tell her of Adolphus? Consider the questions that a mother is sure to ask——"

"I comprehend you—I understand you full well," exclaimed the Marquis. "Tell her that he is a fine tall handsome young man of whom she will be proud. But more;—there are other tidings with which you may gladden her poor heart! Tell her that her daughter Elisabeth is one of the handsomest women of whom England can boast; and that Frank is a youth of an almost fabulous beauty. Go and tell her all this—and I will await you here."

Mrs. Jameson hurried from the room, her countenance beaming with brighter smiles than it had worn for many and many a long day, to execute the pleasing task which she had in hand.

CHAPTER XC.

THE INTERVIEW.

In consequence of what the worthy old housekeeper had said with regard to Lady Everton's personal appearance, the reader is prepared to learn that it had not undergone such a very great change as under all circumstances might have been expected. We will proceed to state that although her ladyship was now forty-six years of age, she might have easily passed herself off as little more than forty. There was no colour upon her cheeks—but the cheeks themselves were not sunken nor hollow: the lustre of her eyes was subdued—but then, in her earlier years it had been so bright that this mitigation of their brilliancy had only softened and not dimmed them. Her hair, of raven darkness, had so far resisted the ravages of time and the withering influence of sorrow, as to be only touching on the commencement of a change—and this to be detected only by a tire-woman when attending the duties of her ladyship's toilet. Her teeth were remarkably well preserved, and helped to ward off the aspect of advancing years. Her figure, as already stated, had retained its fine proportions; and the uprightness of her gait, together with a certain statuesque carriage of the bust and head, which was natural to her, gave her an air of mingled dignity and grace which contributed to sustain her right to be pronounced a fine handsome woman.

Such was Lady Everton—such the object of the Marquis of Eagledean's visit into Wales—such the appearance which she was anon to present before him. But, Ah! if instead of being destined to meet this still handsome and attractive woman, he had been doomed to find her a withered, emaciated, shrivelled creature—with cavern-like eyes, silvered hair, and toothless mouth,—still, still would he have experienced for her the same love—the same sympathy: because *his* was no sensual passion now—it was a chaste and holy affection, feeding itself upon the memories of the past, and sanctified by the existence of two beings who were the pledges of that love.

We need hardly inform the reader that during Mrs. Jameson's absence from the room where the Marquis remained, he experienced an indescribable agitation—a surging-up of a variety of emotions—at the prospect of so speedily meeting the mother of those children. About half-an-hour elapsed,—an interval that was short enough for worthy Mrs. Jameson to break to her ladyship the varied pieces of agreeable intelligence she had to impart—but an interval full long indeed for Lord Eagledean

himself to endure the excitement of his stirred-up feelings. At length the door opened. Eagerly did he glance towards it: but only the housekeeper appeared. Her countenance was beaming with satisfaction and joy; and the Marquis at least gathered thence the assurance that the glad tidings revealed to Lady Everton, had produced no evil effects. Mrs. Jameson beckoned him to follow; and she led the way towards a drawing-room, at the threshold of which she stopped short for a moment.

"My lord," she said, in a low whispering voice, "I shall go no farther: you will enter there alone."

Thus speaking, she opened the door. Oh! at that instant the Marquis of Eagledean felt himself young again——aye, felt as if twenty years had been struck off the sum of his existence—felt as if a new life were rejuvenescent in his veins! He sprang forward—the door closed behind him—a cry of joy reached his ears—a form flew to meet him, quicker than he himself was advancing; and the beloved one of other times—the beloved one too of the present moment—was clasped in his arms. Years of anguish—years of hopeless sorrow—years of separation were all compensated for in these first few moments of ecstatic joy. It may seem strange to speak thus of that old man of sixty and that woman of forty-six: but their hearts had become young again—their memories travelled backward to the joys and delights of by-gone times. Thus the outpourings of their rapture were as fervid and as enthusiastic as if it were a meeting of two youthful lovers. There was a whole world of bliss concentrated in that first embrace;—and joy has its ardour and its ecstacy, its bliss and its intoxication, for those of advanced years as well as for the young.

A few minutes afterwards we may behold them seated together upon a sofa, their hands locked in a firm clasp—their looks rivetted upon each other. Then the Marquis saw that Mrs. Jameson had spoken truly when she represented how comparatively slight was the alteration which had taken place in the personal appearance of Lady Everton. Gradually a mournful feeling stole into the heart of Lord Eagledean; and as a long-drawn sigh rose up to his lips and half found vent ere he could stifle it, Lady Everton said in a low deep voice, "Paton, there is yet a cloud upon your happiness."

"Do you not find me much changed, Alexandrina—Oh, very much changed?" he asked: "do you not see that I have grown old, while you have escaped the ravages of time?"

"Hush, Paton—speak not thus of yourself to me," said her ladyship, still in a soft voice, and looks of ineffable tenderness. "I behold you now through the medium of a faithful memory; I behold you only in the light of that love which I have ever borne you, and which never has been impaired by circumstance or by time. If you find me less changed than you expected, I rejoice——Oh! I rejoice unfeignedly: for even now it is sweet to hear the language of admiration from your lips."

With these words Lady Everton threw her arms around the neck of the Marquis of Eagledean, and embraced him with as much fervour—with as much fond admiration, as if a long, long interval of years had not changed him nor made him old. The sadness fled away from his countenance—he smiled in happiness again: and sweet indeed were the smiles which played upon the lips of Lady Everton.

"It appears to me all like a dream," she said: "for I could not have hoped that there was any happiness in store for me in this world. And yet, I know not how it was—but still there would sometimes arise in my mind strange and unaccountable thoughts, that something would happen to alter my career upon earth,—some new phase in my destiny which was as yet unaccomplished. But then, so often as I found myself indulging in such fancies as these, I endeavoured to banish them from my mind as visions incapable of realisation; and I essayed to settle my thoughts on a complete resignation to my present lot. Then again, I have experienced long, long intervals of a dull, listless, and mournful apathy,—a sort of tomb-like sensation, as if though alive, I was already beneath the numbing influence of death. Ah! *that* was an awful state of feeling: and yet there was a depth of tranquillity in it—an unnatural calm in which my senses were steeped. Had I given way to outbursts of anguish and all the wildness of a terrible excitement, you would not have seen me as you see me now: you would have found me a haggard, wretched, withered thing. But I abandoned myself not to those torrents of feeling—those frenzied outbursts of emotion. Hope appeared to be dead within me, save and except during those occasional intervals when the fanciful vagaries of which I have spoken, would rise up in my mind. But the general tenour of my existence for some years past may be described as the long, long death of hope—that torpor of the senses which is experienced when one knows that there is naught left in the world to crave for. However, this day has suddenly changed all that!—it has given me back happiness—it has filled me with new joy—it has lifted up my soul from the depths of the sepulchre where it was benumbed—it has inspired me with fresh vitality, and with a renovated confidence in the world and in heaven!"

And again, as she spoke, did Lady Everton lavish caresses upon the Marquis of Eagledean; and he also felt that this was a day of indescribable happiness for him. They sat together for more than an hour, talking of their feelings rather than of the circumstances which demanded their attention: they dwelt upon the emotions they experienced, and not upon the plans which they had to discuss and execute. They spoke of Adolphus—of Elizabeth—and of Frank; and the tender mother made the Marquis give her the most life-like description which words could frame of the personal appearance of each of those beloved children of her's.

"And now, my dear Paton," she said, at length suddenly recollecting that after all their discourse nothing was settled—nothing resolved upon, "we must think of the future as well as of the present and the past. You can full well understand that I yearn to fold those dear ones in my arms—that this solitude has suddenly become hateful to me—that I long to fly hence and seek the spot where dwell the objects of my love. Tell me, Paton—tell me,—when you came hither this morning, had you any fixed plan to propose? any project to suggest?"

"My dear Alexandrina," he answered, "can you not perceive at a glance how much depended upon yourself? You bid me talk to you of the future

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The first word I must say is a question that I have to put,—a question that may seem precipitate, but on the response to which does so much of our future plans depend?"

"Paton, I understand you," replied Lady Everton. "If you still think me worthy of bearing your name, you know not the happiness and joy with which I shall receive it!"

The Marquis carried her hand to his lips, exclaiming, "This is the assurance that I alone required to make me happy! And now, my dear Alexandrina, there are two distinct alternatives which I have to submit to your consideration. I allude to the course to be adopted in respect to our two dear children, Elisabeth and Frank. Adolphus is with them: but he knows not that they are his half-brother and sister. Is he to remain in ignorance of this secret? or is he to be made acquainted with it? Those are the alternatives."

"Oh! my decision is given at once," replied Lady Everton. "Adolphus must know all—and God grant that he may not blush for his mother! When I become your wife, how can I possibly treat as comparative strangers—as visitors—or as guests, our dear Elisabeth and Frank? No, no: it were impossible! Let the world think what it will: our children must be acknowledged. I beseech and implore that you will grant me this! Whatever shame there may be to bear, it falls not on the man—it falls on the woman; it will not touch you—it will all become mine; and cheerfully, cheerfully shall I endure it rather than have to disavow those children who have been disavowed too long! I see things in a very different light from that in which I beheld them some years back. Tell me, then, that you will not be ashamed to own as your wife one whom the finger of scandal and scorn may perchance be pointed at when all the past becomes known!"

Lady Everton had spoken thus with a wild gushing vehemence which prevented the Marquis from giving an immediate reply. It was a perfect torrent of feelings,—the feelings of a mother who now knew no other consideration than the duty which she owed towards the children of her only love, and whom she longed to acknowledge as her own.

"It shall all be as you desire," answered the Marquis; "it is for you to decide. Oh! believe me, if you have strength enough to dare the opinion of the world, I have lived long enough to be too independent of it to sacrifice any of my own feelings to its prejudices. Be it therefore as you say, dearest Alexandrina; and rest assured that Adolphus will not blush for you, nor hesitate to own Elisabeth and Frank as a sister and a brother."

"Henceforth all our ideas of happiness," said Lady Everton, "shall be centred in domestic joys. If we be blessed in our children, what care we for the world? And you will be a father to Adolphus, will you not?——Yes, I know you will: for after all he has undergone—after that cruel and hideous captivity—his experience of the world must be circumscribed indeed, and he will require all the counsel and all the care which you can bestow upon him."

"He shall have it," responded the Marquis: "he shall be to me as dear as Elisabeth and Frank themselves. And let me add, my dear Alexandrina," he continued in a lower tone, "that the unsophisticated condition of Adolphus's mind—his inexperience in all worldly matters—his ignorance of the selfish motives which sway men's actions and opinions—and his appreciation of everything that is natural only, in contradistinction to everything that is artificial—will lead him to sympathise with a mother whose hand was sacrificed to one when her heart was engaged to another. No: there is not the slightest dread that Adolphus will blush when he learns that mother's history!"

"What more have we to discuss?" exclaimed Lady Everton, now all in feverish anxiety to flee away from her present abode and hasten to where she could fold her children in her arms: "when shall we depart? My preparations will soon be made: an hour—half-an-hour—a few minutes will suffice. Oh! pray tell me, dear Paton, that we are to go at once! But, Oh—I forgot!" she suddenly exclaimed: "you have travelled day and night—you only arrived here late last evening—you cannot undertake the journey homeward without adequate repose. How selfish I was! But you will pardon me—for I have become another being—you have given me new life,—I feel young—Oh! so young, that I can endure all possible fatigues!"

"There shall be no unnecessary delay," responded the Marquis. "Rest assured that I am as anxious as yourself for the arrival of that moment when Adolphus, Elisabeth, and Frank shall be folded in your arms. Yes: it will prove a spectacle that I long to gaze upon. Dear Alexandrina, though changed in appearance," he added with a smile, "I am not so old that I need nursing. It is now nearly three in the afternoon: if you choose to depart in an hour, let a post-chaise be sent for from the town. Or perhaps, you have your own travelling-carriage?"

"It has been unused for years," replied Lady Everton. "But we will have a post-chaise—we will commence our journey this evening—it will take us at least some distance towards the nearest line of railway connecting the principality with the metropolis. Worthy Mrs. Jameson and my faithful old footman Humphrey shall accompany us."

Having thus spoken, Lady Everton, who was full of a feverish excitement—presenting indeed a wondrous contrast to her slow, measured, and thoughtful movements when the Marquis had first beheld her in the morning walking in the garden,—Lady Everton, we say, in this new state of mind, flew to the bell; and when Humphrey made his appearance, she issued her instructions in a tone of cheerful volubility that filled the old man with delight. For the faithful dependant had already learnt from Mrs. Jameson who the visitor was, and the many glad tidings he had brought with him into Wales; so that he was overjoyed to read in his mistress's manner a confirmation of all he had thus heard.

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It was about six o'clock in the evening of the second day after the incidents which we have been relating, that a hired vehicle from a railway station approached Stamford Manor, and in a few minutes entered the grounds in the midst of which the house stood. Elisabeth, Frank, and Adolphus had not long risen from the dinner-table and retired to the

drawing-room, where they were seated at the moment when the sounds of wheels reached their ears. The approach of a vehicle made them all three start up: for they were anxiously expecting either the return of the Marquis, or some intelligence from him. They precipitated themselves down the stairs: but Lord Eagledean, rushing forth from the vehicle before they could perceive there was any one else with him whom he had left inside, met them in the hall, and bade them accompany him to a parlour opening thence.

"Now, Adolphus," he said, when he had embraced all three one after the other,—"and you likewise, Elizabeth and Frank, prepare yourselves to behold some one who is most dear to you."

"Our mother!" ejaculated Francis, heedless at the moment whether there were any longer the necessity to keep the secret from Adolphus.

"Yes—your mother, my dear boy," responded the Marquis, in a voice full of emotion; "and *your* mother likewise, my dear Adolphus. Yes: I speak truly! Embrace Elizabeth and Frank—for they are indeed your sister and your brother—and *your* mother is also *theirs!*"

Adolphus gave utterance to a cry of mingled amazement and joy: for without pausing to reflect how this could possibly be, his first feeling was one of ineffable delight to think that Elizabeth whom he already loved as a sister, was indeed a sister—and Frank whom he loved as a brother, was indeed a brother!"

"I go to fetch your mother," said the Marquis, in a hasty whisper to Elizabeth: "she longs to press you all three in her arms. During the few moments that I shall be absent you may tell Adolphus who I am——Yes, you may tell him that I am the Marquis of Eagledean."

Having thus spoken, he hastily quitted the room: but little more than a minute elapsed ere he returned again, accompanied by Lady Everton. Then ensued a scene which, for tenderness and excitement—for melting emotions and joyous outpourings alike of words and tears—for fervid embraces, repeated again, and again, and again—for fondest endearments and enthusiastic caresses, has had no parallel in this world.

CHAPTER XCI.

THE PREPARED PIT-FALL.

We must now pay another visit to Solomon Patch's public-house in Agar Town. It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening, when Madge Somers, dressed in her usual gipsy-like style,—but looking more travel-soiled, weary, and careworn than she had ever yet appeared,—dragged herself painfully into that den. She was evidently sinking with fatigue; and throwing herself upon a seat in the open space fronting the bar, she bade Solomon at once serve her with some liquor.

"You seem ill, or else very tired, observed the old man, as he presented her with a foaming pint of pester. "There! take that—and if it doesn't cheer you up a bit, then my name isn't what it be."

The woman placed the pint-measure to her lips, and did not remove it till she had poured the whole of its contents down her throat: then, as she handed back the vessel to Solomon Patch, she said, "Yes, I am indeed tired. I have walked many weary miles to-day, but was resolved to reach your place to-night. Let me see—what is the day of the month?"

"Well now, what be it?" asked the old man, turning towards his wife. "Why, the tenth of August, to be sure."

"Yes—the tenth," repeated Madge Somers: then in an under-tone to herself, she said, "It was the twenty-first of July the appointment was made:—in one month, day for day, and hour for hour, was I to meet him at his own house. That will be on the twenty-first instant at nine o'clock in the evening. Twenty days have elapsed, and I am no wiser than I was: I have eleven more days to find out what I want!"

"And what is it you do want, Madge?" asked Solomon Patch: for the woman had spoken those last words in a louder tone than the previous part of the sentence, and they had caught the landlord's ear. "I do really think she has lost her wits," he observed aside to three or four customers of the *Billy Goat*, who were lounging and tippling at the bar-counter.

"Not a bit of it!" said Madge Somers sternly: for her keen ears had caught the observation. "But you ask me what it is that I want to find out? Well, I have come here this evening to set every one who is in the habit of frequenting the place, on the alert to discover what I *do* want. Are there many people in the tap-room yonder?"

"Some dozen or so," replied Solomon; "and I tell you who's amongst them—an old pal of mine that I haven't seen for many a-day—Bob Shakerly."

"The resurrection-man," observed Madge Somers.

"Well, I don't think he does much in that way now," remarked Solomon: "cos why, he finds it more to his account to cut up cases for sassage-meat and what not. Howsumever, he's found his way down to the *Goat* this evening to smoke his pipe and take his rum-and-water: and there the old fellow is in the tap-room, as cosis as can be."

"Just come along with me, Solomon," said Madge: "and you also," she continued, addressing herself to the loungers about the bar.

"What on earth is she going to do now?" asked Solomon of himself, as Madge herself led the way into the public room, where the usual number of ill-looking fellows and half-tipsy women were pursuing their orgie, old Bob Shakerly being one of the company.

"Why, here's Madge Somers!" said Tony Wilkins: "and she looks as wild as if she was a witch."

"Witch indeed!" she echoed: "I am not witch enough to find out something that I want to discover—or rather I have not succeeded yet: but I will offer a prize and set all you folks on the alert, and see whether *that* will be productive of any good result."

As she thus spoke, she took from beneath her garments a greasy pocket-book; and opening it, drew forth a number of bank-notes. These she counted, keeping some in her hand and putting the rest back into the pocket-book,—her proceeding being watched with mingled curiosity and suspense by all who beheld her.

"Now, Solomon Patch," she said, turning towards the landlord, "here's fifty pounds in good Bank of England notes; and I am going to entrust the sum to your keeping. You are all witnesses of the deposit!"

"But what be it for?" asked the old man, gazing with astonishment upon Madge Somers, and almost hesitating to receive the money, lest some treacherous intent should lurk beneath this conduct on her part.

"Take it—do not be afraid," she said: "I will soon explain myself. And now listen, all of you! Some years ago there was the manager of a company of strolling-players, whose name was Thompson: but what has become of him, I do not know. It is precisely this knowledge that I want to obtain. If any one will bring me the information I require before eight o'clock in the evening of the twenty-first of this month, the individual thus giving me that information, shall receive the fifty pounds which I have just lodged in the hands of Solomon Patch."

Numerous voices shouted out the willingness of the speakers to enter upon the search.

"If he's above ground, I'm blowed if I don't ferret him out," exclaimed Tony Wilkins, darting from his seat with the air of one resolved to enter upon the search at once.

"I knows a many poor vimen as was vunce strolling performers," observed a half-tipsy female, with a hiccup at every second word she spoke: "it's astonishing how them poor creaturs comes down in their hold hage. There's vun as used to play queens and great ladies, and was very poppilar: but now she's took to get her livelihood by charing and what not."

"Oh, you be hanged!" ejaculated a rough-looking fellow, eager to put in his word. "I'll have a try for the fifty pound prize. But can't you give us no more partiklers, Madge?"

"Nothing more," she responded curtly.

"'Spose he's dead, this feller Thompson," observed Solomon Patch: "what then? It ain't no use looking arter him—be it?"

"Unless," remarked another of the women belonging to the company of revellers in the tap-room, "old Bob Shakerly here would have up his sarkiss."

"A truce to this nonsense," interrupted Madge, with a severe look. "I have said what I wanted, and the reward is lodged in Solomon's hands. Those who like to undertake the search, can do it: those who don't, can leave it alone. But it may be that if the information is given to me at the time specified, I shall increase the amount of recompense according to my means."

"Unless she loses every skurrick she's got at the vimen's gaming-table on Saffron Hill," whispered one of the guests to another.

"Well, I'm off at once," said Tony Wilkins. "Fifty pounds! my eye, it isn't to be got every day!"

"One word more," exclaimed Madge Somers. "From seven to eight o'clock on the evening of the twenty-first of August, I shall be here to receive the information required, if any one is enabled to furnish it. But I expect positive proof of the accuracy of this information. In short, Sol Patch will not part with the reward until the intelligence that may be brought is shown to be correct."

Having thus spoken, Madge Somers turned abruptly round and issued from the room. Passing into the bar-parlour, she desired Mrs. Patch to give her some refreshments in the shape of eatables: and the order being obeyed, the woman commenced an attack upon the cold meat and other things placed before her, which showed that she must have been fasting some hours. Meanwhile Solomon Patch, having secured the fifty pounds in his strong-box, experienced no small degree of curiosity to learn wherefore Madge was so anxious to find out this Thompson of whom she had spoken. Bidding his wife attend to the bar, he passed into the room behind, with two glasses of hot spirits-and-water; and placing them upon the table, seated himself opposite to Madge Somers.

"Come," said he, "you won't refuse to drink, for old acquaintance' sake. Here's a health to you, and wishing that the business you've been a speaking of may turn out all right."

"I hope it will," she remarked abruptly. "What news in Agar Town? Anything fresh?"

"Nothing partikler," responded Solomon. "But about this little business of your'n, Madge—can I be of any assistance? Of course you must know summut more about the man Thompson than you've chose to say."

"Nothing," she observed: then in order to change the conversation, she asked, "Have you seen Chiffin lately?"

"Well, yes—I have," answered Solomon: and he seemed to speak with some little degree of hesitation.

"Is anything the matter with him?" asked Madge, looking at the old man fixedly: "anything turned up about that barge affair?"

"No—it all seems to have died away as comfortable as possible. But here he be:"—and as he spoke, the Cannibal, dressed in his usual style, entered the bar-parlour.

"Hullo, Madge!" he exclaimed: "who would have thought of seeing you here? Why, I've been up to your cottage yonder two or three times during the last week; and it was all shut up and as silent as a grave."

"Did you want me, then?" she asked.

"Well, I did rather. Just step along with me. Here, Sol, bring us up some liquor into the private room: for me and Madge have got some particular business to talk about."

"Ah! about them preparations that you've been making, I suppose," said the old man, with a sly look, full of dark and sinister meaning.

"Well, it may be," growled the Cannibal: "but don't you let your tongue run quite so free—'cos why, how did you know I was going to speak to Madge on that subject? and if I wasn't, then you would have made her suspect something."

"Oh! I only meant that if you are going to let her into the secret," replied Solomon, "I am glad of it: for she's a discreet woman, and you can trust her. Besides, as I won't do it myself——"

"Now hold your jaw, you cursed old fool," interposed Chiffin, his diabolical countenance contracting with an expression of hideous ferocity, while he grasped his club as if about to strike. "As you get old you become so precious talkative there's no doing

nothing with you. How do you know that what's said in here, if spoke too loud, isn't heard by the people at the bar?"

"I didn't mean no offence, Mr. Chiffin," said the old man, trembling from head to foot: for he stood fearfully in awe of the dreaded Cannibal.

"Well then, look sharp—bring us up some brandy—and lend us this light."

Thus speaking, Chiffin took up the candle from the table, and led the way from the bar, followed by Madge Somers. He ascended to that miserable-looking room up-stairs which has been before described in earlier chapters of this narrative; and placing the candle upon the table, he said, "Let us sit down, Madge: we've got some business to talk about. But wait a bit till old Solomon has brought up the lush and the glasses; and then we shall be all to ourselves."

Madge Somers made no remark; but with her usual imperturbability sat down, patiently awaiting the promised explanations. While casually casting her eyes round the small and cheerless-looking room, she suddenly observed that a door had been pierced on one side.

"I see that Solomon has been making some alterations in his house," she said to the Cannibal.

"Ah! you mean that door," he remarked, with a smile of grim and sinister meaning which did not escape the woman's notice. "You know where it leads to?"

"It must lead into Solomon's own bed-chamber," said Madge, after a moment's reflection, during which she passed in review the precise arrangements of the house and the distribution of the rooms, with all of which she was well acquainted. "To be sure!—that door on the landing leads into Solomon's chamber: but what has made him have another door made, communicating from this room?"

"I'll tell you all about it presently," returned Chiffin, with another peculiar smile, which was about as pleasing as the grin of some horrible monster.

At this moment Solomon made his appearance with the liquor that had been ordered; and as he placed the tray upon the table, he threw a significant look at that new door which had been made—then bent his eyes upon Chiffin—next on Madge—and then retreated from the room, closing the outer door behind him.

"Now, perhaps," said Madge Somers, "you will begin your explanations, and tell me what you want with me: because I can assure you my time is fully occupied."

"Then I suppose you've got plenty of business on hand?" said Chiffin, mixing himself a tumbler of brandy-and-water.

"Yes—you know full well that I am seldom idle. But you seem busy also. By the bye, I thought the last time I saw you, Chiffin, you intended to take a public-house or settle down in some fashion or another. Don't you remember when and where it was? That night, on the bank of the canal——"

"I recollect all about it," interrupted the Cannibal savagely, as if he did not over and above like the particular allusion thus made. "It was when you came to bring me the news that Lady Saxondale didn't mean to let the detectives go on against me and Tony Wilkins. Of course you guessed very well who it was that did the business for that scoundrel Tugs and his wife——they meant to do for me and get all my money: but I'm blowed if I didn't do for them!"

"It served them right," remarked Madge coolly. "But what business have you in hand?"

"Something that will put a decent sum into my pocket," answered Chiffin; "and then with what I have got already, I shall be ready to retire from business altogether," he added with a chuckling laugh; "and instead of taking boosing-kens or lodging-houses, or anything of that sort, I shall settle down as a genelman and live on my means. But as you have let me into a many good things with you, I'll let you into this with me—leastways, I want some one to help in doing a certain thing; and as old Solomon won't have anything to do with it himself, I thought of you. So I have been up to your place two or three times, but couldn't find you——"

"Well, never mind," interrupted Madge: "you have found me at last. Here I am—and now for your explanations. What do you want me for? and what can I get by helping you?"

"Fifty guineas," responded the Cannibal; "and only for a few minutes' work."

"Well, proceed. My time is occupied: but still I can spare enough for your purpose, particularly if it is to be well paid."

The Cannibal drew his seat a little closer to that where Madge was placed; and having drained his tumbler, and mixed himself another jorum of hot brandy-and-water, he addressed her in the following manner:—

"I am not going to mention any names, 'cause why it isn't necessary. But you must know that there's a certain party who wants two other parties put out of the way. It's two genelmen whose disappearance I have got to bring about. The hint how to do it was given me by the lady—for it *is* a lady—and I don't mind saying this much—who is employing me. She doesn't want these two genelmen to have their throats cut and their bodies found any where above ground, which would only cause an immense sensation, as the newspapers say, and lead to no end of inquiries. But what she wants is for these two genelmen to slip out of the world just as easy as if the earth opened and swallowed them up—so that there sha'n't remain the least clue to show where they have gone. Their friends and relations may fancy they have ran away, or anything they like: but that's no business of mine. It's enough for me to know that if these two genelmen disappear all snug and comfortable, with no chance of never turning up no more, I shall get two——I mean a decentish sum, out of which I can afford to pay you fifty for helping me."

"Go on," said Madge, imperturbably. "I am listening."

"Well, you see," proceeded Chiffin, "I sha'n't be at any loss to entice those two genelmen here; because I know how to do it, and have got an excuse ready. And what's more too, I have got the arrangements all made, settled, and done, to send them out of existence much nicer and easier than if they was let down on the drop at the Old Bailey: 'cause why, *here* there won't be no ropes round their necks to break their fall and hold 'em up tight."

"Go on," said Madge again, her countenance now exhibiting some degree of interest.

"Come and look here," said Chiffin.

Taking up the candle, he opened that newly made door which had already engaged the woman's notice, and led her into the adjoining room, which for many years had served as the chamber where Solomon Patch and his wife were wont to sleep. Madge, as before stated, knew it well: but she now found it completely changed. The bed had been removed—it was no longer fitted as a sleeping-room at all, but was arranged as a parlour; though still meanly enough furnished. There were a few windsor chairs; a table stood upon a carpet about twelve feet square; and a large piece of furniture, like a bureau, was placed against the original door of communication, which opened from the landing. This door we will henceforth call the *old one*, to prevent any confusion when speaking of the *new one* which had been made to communicate with the adjoining room.

"Well," said Madge Somers, glancing around, "I perceive all the changes that have taken place here: but I cannot understand their purpose."

"I will soon tell you," replied Chiffin, with another of his half-ferocious half-sinister grins, accompanied too with a low chuckling laugh. "It was lucky I knew a capital feller of a carpenter, and another good chap of a bricklayer—two blades of our own sort, and who were glad enough to work for a friend like me as long as they were well paid. Why, I was forced to give old Solomon fifty guineas to let me pull his house to pieces like this here. But I tell you what's more—I have humbugged him," added Chiffin, lowering his voice to a whisper, "that I will take the *Billy Goat* off his hands, and give him a thousand pounds for the good will. He knows I have got the best part of the blunt, and shall have the rest: and so he bit at it directly."

Madge Somers was too keen and penetrating not to have already suspected, from what the Cannibal had been saying, that the changed but tranquil aspect of the room concealed some preparations fearfully treacherous; and she bent a look of augmenting curiosity upon the Cannibal.

"Now, Madge," he said, continuing to speak in a low mysterious voice, "you will understand it all in a few minutes. Didn't you know that in one of the cellars underneath this house, there's a thundering deep well, which hasn't been used for a great many years, because somehow or another the water was found to be putrid. It may be that a dead body found its way to the bottom a long time ago, which made the water bad: but whether or not, the well has never been used for the last fifteen years, and the mouth of it in the cellar was covered up with paving stones. Well, the next thing I must remind you of is, that underneath this room where we are standing—and therefore betwixt this floor and the ceiling of the cellar—there's that scullery-place which old Sol and his wife have never used except to put odd things in. One of the very first things that I had done, was to have the bricklayer and brick up the window of the scullery that looks into the back yard—all natural enough, 'cos why the window was broken out and Solomon pretended to be afraid that some of the queer chaps which frequents the house might get in through that way and pay a visit to the premises which they are so familiar with. The next thing was to make a large hole in the scullery floor, which formed an opening, as you can very well understand, into the cellar; and of course it was managed that this opening should be just above the mouth of the well. The third thing to be done was to cut a square out of this floor here where we are standing——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Madge, for a moment losing her presence of mind, as Chiffin pointed with his club down towards the carpet—and she instinctively started back.

"Why, you ain't such a fool," he exclaimed, with a chuckling laugh, "to think that I am going to send you right bang through to the bottom, are you? Not I, indeed! You've never done me no harm, but some good turns at times——"

"Go on," said Madge, instantaneously recovering her self-possession: "but it was enough to make one start to know that one was standing upon a trap-door which might suddenly fall like a gibbet-drop beneath the feet."

"Yes: and it's arranged just like a gibbet-drop too! Look here—the trap-door is exactly in this spot:"—and Chiffin kicked aside the carpet as he spoke, showing that the square cut out of the floor was just between the threshold of the new door that had been formed, and the table.

"I understand," observed Madge. "You expect that the two gentlemen who are to be so pleasantly disposed of, will pass, one close upon the heels of the other, through this new door; and then the instant they stand on the trap-door, down it is to fall!"

"If you had concocted it all yourself, you couldn't have described it better," observed the Cannibal. "You see, I shall lead the way, as if it was all fair and right enough, and make believe as if I was going to sit down with them swell coves to deliberate at this table. They will follow—and then, as you have so well twigged it, down they must go! You see, on account of the situation of the well underneath, it was necessary to have the trap-door exactly in this spot; and therefore it would not have done to introduce them by the *old door*. If so, when coming in, they would pass clear of the trap. Now, as it is, the moment they pass the threshold of the *new door*, they put their feet on the trap, and it's done in a jiffey."

"And the assistance you require of me," said Madge, now fully penetrating the object for which her own services were needed, "is to pull the bell, or touch the secret spring, or whatever the contrivance is, just at the proper instant?"

"Right again, old gal!" answered Chiffin. "You see that great lumbering bit of furniture against the old door. Well, it's nothing but front and sides—the back and the shelves are all taken out; and so any person can hide inside of it. That's the place where you will be. There's a hole in the front here —— look, you see it —— where you can peep through. You will have to go on your knees, because the spring that lets the trap fall is in the floor just behind that furniture. So, when once you have plumped down on your knees —— not to say your prayers," parenthetically observed the Cannibal, with another diabolical laugh —— "you can peep with one eye through the hole, and catch hold of the iron knob of the spring with one hand at the same time. It works precious easy, as I will show you when the moment comes. But you must take precious good care not to let *me* down through the trap instead of the two gentlemen."

Again did Chiffin indulge in a coarse but subdued guffaw; while Madge Somers, with her wonted imperturbability, remarked, "Don't be afraid—I shall be looking out for my reward, and as it will be in your pocket I shall not send you down into the well. But when do you think this business is likely to take place?"

"I only wanted somebody that I could rely upon to help," answered Chiffin, "in order to take the necessary measures to get the two genelmen here as soon as possible. Now that I have seen you, and you've agreed, I'll set about it without delay. Perhaps, if you was to call here the day after to-morrow, I should be able to tell you more. Or shall I look up at the cottage?"

"No—I shall not be found there," answered Madge.

"Well, I think it was high time for you to leave that wretched tumble-down crib," observed the Cannibal. "You will call here——eh?"

"Yes—the day after to-morrow. If you are busy elsewhere, leave word with old-Sol when I am likely to be wanted, and I will be punctual. And now, if you have nothing more to say, I shall wish you good night."

"Good night, Madge. But I say, by the bye," exclaimed Chiffin, "do you happen to have seen that Lady Saxondale of late—she, you know, that me and Tony——"

"As if I did not know perfectly well who you mean," interrupted Madge, fixing her eyes keenly upon the Cannibal for a moment, and then averting them.

"Of course—because you stalled her off from setting the detectives to work. How the deuce did you manage to have any influence with her?"

"We will talk upon that subject another day," responded the woman.

"Yes: and then may be——But no matter," said the Cannibal, interrupting himself: for he was afraid if he let drop any more, Madge would suspect that her ladyship was his employer in the present business, and that if she found out he had been promised the enormous sum of two thousand guineas for accomplishing the diabolical deed, she would not be contented with the fifty guineas which he had offered for her assistance.

"Good night," said Madge once more: and she thereupon took her departure from Solomon Patch's boozing-ken.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE FEMALE GAMESTERS.

It was about half-past ten o'clock when Madge Somers emerged from the precincts of Agar Town. For a little while she walked on slowly and thoughtfully, as if pondering deeply on all that had taken place at Solomon Patch's, and likewise hesitating as to what particular course she should pursue. But by degrees her thoughts settled themselves into a resolution; and when this was once taken, she quickened her pace as she proceeded on her way. She reached King's Cross, and passed down Gray's Inn Road. In half-an-hour from the time she left Agar Town, she drew near the mass of streets, alleys, and courts which constitute that vile district whereof Saffron Hill may be deemed the principal thoroughfare. Still she walked on; and, at length, on reaching Saffron Hill itself, suddenly stopped short.

"No," she said, in subdued but vehement ejaculation: "I will *not* go there again! I have a duty to perform—and it must be done."

Nevertheless, there appeared to be an inclination in this woman's mind stronger than that sense of duty to which she had alluded; and while she fain would have obeyed the latter, she was irresistibly urged on by the former. She advanced for some twenty or thirty yards, and then stopped short again: a powerful struggle was taking place within her. But her weak point proved the stronger one, paradoxical as the expression may seem;—and still she walked on. On reaching the entrance of a court, dismal and dark as the mouth of a cave, she paused once more—she endeavoured to turn her steps in another direction—but her evil genius prevailed: she plunged into a court—and muttering to herself, "Only just for one short half-hour!" knocked three times at the door of a house at the farther extremity.

It was opened in a few moments by a female; and a light glimmered faintly forth: but the door was only thus opened to the length of a chain which held it secure, until Madge Somers mentioned her name: for in the darkness of that court her countenance was scarcely discernible even with the glimmering light that struggled out. Then the chain was let loose—the door opened—and she exchanged a few words with the female who had thus given her admittance. This was the mistress of the house—the presiding genius of one of the vilest dens which then existed, or still exist, in the British metropolis. She was an elderly woman, with a pale ghost-like countenance, and small dark eyes, glittering like those of a reptile, but looking larger than they were by reason of the blue circles of the hollow caverns wherein they were set. Her features were sharp—even painfully thin; and her mouth, surrounded by wrinkles, was drawn in with a constant habit of compression. Some grizzly gray hair escaped from beneath a dirty white cap, which added to the corpse-like appearance of her countenance. Her figure was lean and shrivelled: she wore a soiled rusty black stuff gown, and seemed to have but very little under-clothing—for the skirt fell straight, without the slightest bulging out from the waist. Altogether she was a hideous-looking creature—not merely repulsive, but a woman whose aspect was sufficient to make a beholder afraid. A capacity for any wickedness was as legibly imprinted upon that vile countenance, as if her character had been printed thereon.

She led the way down a narrow, dirty, dilapidated staircase, into a back kitchen. This place was not more than fifteen feet square, and all the centre was occupied by a large deal table. There was a rude form on each side, and a wooden stool at either extremity. Two tallow-candles in brass sticks stood upon the table, around which were crowded—indeed, huddled as closely as they could pack themselves—a number of females, whose ages ranged from the young girl of thirteen or fourteen to the old hag of seventy or eighty. The heat was stifling, but the company present appeared not to feel the least inconvenience from that sickly atmosphere,—

all their thoughts and all their senses being absorbed in the occupation that was going on. And this was gambling.

Yes: it was a gambling-house for females. None of the other sex were admitted there; and only those who were well known to the mistress of the den, or who were properly introduced by old-standing friends, could obtain ingress thither. At the head of the table sat a woman who was as much like the one we have already described as any human being can possibly resemble another. Indeed, they were sisters: but it was the elder one, who had admitted Madge Somers, that was the mistress of the place—the other was merely paid by the first-named to conduct the gaming-table. We are thus minute as to particulars, because it is no imaginary den which we are describing, but one which existed at the period whereof we are writing.

The woman who presided at the gaming-table, kept a regular "bank"—just the same as at the great gambling-houses of the West End, one of which we described in an earlier chapter of this narrative. The "bank," which was contained in a tin box with three distinct compartments, consisted of gold, silver, and copper money; and the woman who acted as *croupiere*, had a wooden rake to gather up or push the coin about in the most approved style of the avocation. An imperturbable gravity rested upon her thin ghastly countenance; and if there were any personal trait in which she differed from her elder sister, it was that her eyes, though equally as sinister in expression, had a more steady gaze: but when fixed upon you, they produced the horrible effect of a snake that glares intently upon your countenance!

The female gamblers, assembled in this den, were not entirely of that excessively low description which the reader may possibly have anticipated at the outset. There were several women amongst them who, by their appearance, were evidently the wives of small shopkeepers residing in the neighbourhood: but three or four of the youngest were prostitutes, who plied their hideous calling in that vicinage, and who, when they obtained a few pence or shillings, rushed to this den in the hope of increasing by one vice the gains derived from another.

If we were to take a peep into the front kitchen of the house to which we have introduced the reader, we should find ample preparations in progress for a supper that was to wind up the night's amusements. A large table, twice the size of that in the back kitchen, was spread for at least four-and-twenty guests. A number of black-handled knives and forks, pewter pots, metal salt-cellars, pepper-castors, and mustard-pots, were spread upon a dirty cloth; and at an immense fire a horrid-looking old woman, evidently half-tipsy and who took quantities of snuff in the filthiest manner possible, was superintending the culinary process. A leg of mutton and a leg of pork, roasting in front of the grate, were both basted with the gravy that dripped from each and which united in a large yellow pie-dish set to catch it. Upon the fire, another leg of pork and another leg of mutton were boiling in an enormous cauldron, together with a piece of beef; and divers saucepans contained proportionate quantities of vegetables. It may be thought that these masses of provisions were immense considering that the table was laid but for two dozen guests: but when it is stated that each one of those guests would anon be prepared to attack the provender with the utmost voracity, and to eat as long as the physical capacity would allow, it will be seen that the preparations were by no means on too large a scale. We must add that this supper was given gratuitously to all the frequenters of the house, who might drop in between the hours of nine in the evening and one in the morning to take their chance at the gaming-table. The supper, thus provided without cost to the devourers, was a great allurement for the establishment: but the profits of the gaming-table were ample enough to permit this spread to be given nightly.

All the upper part of the house remained unoccupied, except by the two sisters and the old cook: no lodgers were received, the great aim being to keep the real nature of the place as secret as possible. The elder sister, who was the mistress of the establishment, had kept it for years. She had amassed several thousand pounds; and in one of the northern suburbs of London there is a row of some ten or a dozen small cottages, built by means of that money upon freehold land, and all this infamous woman's property!

It was to the den which we have been describing that Madge Somers paid a visit after leaving Solomon Patch's house in Agar Town; and she was evidently as well known at the former as at the latter place—for on entering the back-kitchen, nods of recognition passed between herself and the assembled female-gamesters. But few words were exchanged, as all were too intent on the chances of the dice to have much thought for other subjects. The stool at the foot of the table being vacant, Madge took it: and for some minutes she watched the game with the eagerness of one of its most impassioned votaries. All recollection of that duty which she had imposed upon herself, and which had more than once made her hesitate when on her way thither from Agar Town, was now lost sight of: she had no thought, no sense, no faculty for anything save and except the game that was progressing. At the expiration of about ten minutes, she drew forth her greasy old pocket-book, and producing a bank-note, requested change of the *croupiere*. This was immediately given; and she staked a sovereign. She lost. Again she paused for a few minutes, ere she ventured another coin: but presently the chances of the dice seemed favourable once more, and a second piece of gold was staked. Now she won. Then followed a run of luck; and in about ten minutes twenty sovereigns were piled up before her. With a kind of desperate resolution she rose from her seat, and said she should go: but she was immediately assailed by numerous entreaties on the part of the players, "that she would take *one* more chance."

She wavered—the entreaties were pressed: she consented—and sat down again. In another ten minutes the pile of gold had disappeared; and another note from her pocket-book was changed. The run of luck was now against her, while a young girl of barely fourteen, who had commenced that evening with a few coppers, had ten or a dozen sovereigns in front of her.

The game continued; and presently the mistress of the establishment, who had quitted the back-kitchen almost immediately after Madge's arrival,

re appeared, bearing a tray on which was a single wine-glass, while in her right hand she carried a large stone jar. This contained gin—or rather a compound of the woman's own concoction, consisting of some of the distiller's spirit, with a very large amount of vitriol and sugared water. She filled the wine-glass, and presented it to the young girl who was winning gold. The lost creature took it and poured its contents with avidity down her throat, giving a sigh of pleasure when she had imbibed the deleterious fluid. The glass was re-filled, and presented to the female who sat next. In this manner it went the complete round—Madge Somers being the only person who did not accept the proffered dram: for of all her vices a love of ardent spirits was not one.

The fiery liquor gave an unnatural exhilaration to the spirits of those who were already excited by the fluctuating chances of the game. But it must be confessed that the whole proceedings of this den were in one sense orderly enough. If ever a player attempted to quarrel, or disputed some particular point, she was instantaneously called to order by the *croupiers*, and the effect was truly magical—for that woman had contrived to establish a despotic authority over the frequenters of the house, and thus was she invaluable to her elder sister. An occasional oath passed unnoticed: but if anything really obscene or disgusting was said, it immediately called forth a severe rebuke, accompanied by a threat of expulsion—in which menace the generality of the players seemed perfectly ready to back the *croupiers*; for it must be understood, as already hinted, that there were several females present who called themselves "respectable married women."

It requires but little effort of the imagination to penetrate the circumstances under which some of these "respectable married women" visited this den. We may suppose one to be the wife of a man keeping a potato and coal shed; that she had gone out to collect a few little debts owing by the poorer customers in that neighbourhood; and that with the few shillings thus gathered into her purse she dropped in with the hope of converting them into as many guineas. If she lost, she would go home full of excuses to her husband: the debtors had not paid—she had fallen in with her friend Mrs. So-and-so, who had engaged her to supper—and hence her coming home so late. Perhaps the husband himself was at the public-house; and reeling home half-tipsy at a still later hour, was unaware of the time when his wife had entered. Very likely a quarrel might take place, originating on one side or the other: but what might be still more certainly reckoned upon, was that in the long run the principal profits of the business would go into the pocket of the woman keeping the gambling den, and insolvency would overtake the potato and coal shed.

From the little sketch thus hurriedly given, the reader may form an idea of that class of "respectable married females" who frequented the den. There are at this moment several gambling-houses for females in London; and many a small tradesman finds out to his cost, that his wife has been allured to one of these *pandemonia*. As a matter of course, the idea of those who frequent such places is, as we have above hinted, that they will convert their pence into shillings, and their shillings into pounds. Insensate fools! infatuated wretches! If they only paused and reflected for a single moment, they would perceive that the keeper of the gaming-house alone nets the profit—and that this profit is to the loss of the gamesters themselves.

But to return to the thread of our narrative: Madge Somers continued playing—at first cautiously, as we have seen her—then, as she lost, with a growing recklessness—and ultimately, as her losses increased, with a kind of desperation. She did not give way to any outburst of passion—she neither vociferated nor gesticulated: but her looks, her attitude, her entire bearing indicated one prolonged, continuous, and concentrated sense of terrific excitement. Now her eyebrows were drawn up—now they became corrugated: now her half-open mouth and the suspended breath showed the poignancy of her suspense—then the nervous quickness with which she drew forth another note and hazarded another stake, served as a farther proof of the desperate recklessness with which she was playing. Ultimately, at about two o'clock in the morning, she rose from her seat at the foot of the table,—muttering to herself, "Not a shilling left! no, not a penny!"

But still she thrust her long bony fingers into every recess of the greasy old pocket book, to ascertain if perchance a bank-note, or even a sovereign might have become embedded in some corner. No: it was empty—and she was indeed penniless. The remains of the last sum of money she had received from Lady Saxondale had that night been swallowed up in the same vortex to which hundreds and hundreds of pounds of the woman's money—the ill-gotten gains of long years of crime—had already found their way.

"Now then for supper!" ejaculated that same young girl whom we have already noticed as being in Fortune's favour on this particular night: and well she might speak exultingly; for she was the possessor of thirty golden sovereigns—a sum that appeared to her a colossal fortune.

"You will stay and take some supper, Madge?" said the elder sister of the two who presided over that den of infamy.

"Not I. You know I never stay to supper," responded Madge Somers: and then, in a savage tone, she added, "Come and open the door, and let me get away as quick as ever I can."

The keeper of the gambling-house was too well accustomed to Madge Somers' eccentric moods to take any notice of the present one; and she accordingly gave the inveterate female-gamester prompt egress from the place.

CHAPTER XCIII.

WILLIAM AND ANGELA.

It was on the evening of the day following the incidents recorded in the previous chapter, that, between eight and nine o'clock, William Deveril and his sister Angela were seated together in the ground-floor parlour of their beautiful little villa near the Regent's Park. The weather was warm, even to sultriness: for there was not the slightest breeze to dispel the heat which the sun of a glowing August day had left behind after sinking into its western home. The curtains had within a few

minutes been drawn over the window: but the casement itself was open. A lamp burnt on the table; and its light shone upon the handsome countenance of the young artist, and on the enchanting features of his sister, as they conversed together in a cheerful strain.

An angel in loveliness as well as in name, that beauteous creature might well be described as the most ravishing embodiment of female charms ever beheld by mortal eyes. We delineated her portrait in one of the earliest chapters of this narrative, when she appeared upon the stage of the Opera: we described her when she burst upon the delighted vision of the thousands gathered there to pour forth their enthusiastic plaudits, which were as much a tribute to her matchless beauty as to her proficiency in the dance. We beheld her *then*, expressing and personifying the poetry of motion with sylph-like delicacy and winning grace. We *now* behold her at home, beneath her own roof—plainly but tastefully attired; and though the brilliancy of the portrait may be somewhat subdued, yet has it lost nothing of its beauty. The dress which she now wears, sets off the exquisite symmetry of her shape to as much advantage as did the aerial drapery which she wore upon the stage: the statuesque contours of her full and graceful form are developed, while at the same time they are concealed, by the costume which now clothes them. Her shining dark hair falls in massive tresses upon the softly-rounded shoulders: her eyes, so large and dark, beam with the holiest lustre of purity and innocence. Bright as are those regards, yet are they full of a virginal chastity: for her's were looks which angels themselves might bend upon earth from the sunny regions of heaven. It needed but a single glance at Angela Deveril to convince the beholder that virtue had chosen her fair bosom as a temple wherein to establish its home, and that the purity of her thoughts had not been marred by her contact with the theatrical sphere.

We said that the brother and sister were conversing cheerfully; and it was so. For was not William now happy in his love for the beauteous Florina Staunton? and was not Angela happy at the success which thus promised to crown her brother's highest aspirations? She herself knew not what love was—she had never known it—naught beyond the love which she had experienced for her parents, and which she felt for her brother: but to that *other* love which glowed in *his* heart towards Florina, and which Florina reciprocated so tenderly and so devotedly, the unsophisticated Angela was utterly a stranger. She however saw that it was potent to produce happiness or misery; and now that it was creative of the former feeling in respect to her brother, she rejoiced that she should know it and acknowledge its empire.

But let us listen to some part of the conversation which is taking place between them.

"It is close upon nine o'clock," said William, looking at his watch; "and our kind friend Mr. Gunthorpe is always punctual."

"What think you, dear William, that he can mean," asked Angela, "by that expression in his note of yesterday, which bade us prepare for some strange revelations in respect to himself?"

"I cannot conceive, sweet sister," responded our hero "But this I do know, and am rejoiced at—— that in the same letter he emphatically repeated the assurance he gave me a little while ago, that you were to bid adieu to the stage."

"Ah! is he not benevolent? is he not good?" exclaimed Angela. "How is it that we have found so much favour in his sight?"

"He is one of those men," responded William, "who are delighted in doing good. I fear from certain expressions which he has at times let drop, that he has known much care and sorrow in past years: but instead of hardening his heart—instead of embittering his feelings against the world—whatsoever sufferings he has experienced, have only tended to enlarge his philanthropy. There are few men like Mr. Gunthorpe, Angela; and there are few persons who, like us, possess so dear and valued a friend."

"It is indeed a source of infinite congratulation for ourselves," rejoined Angela: then after a few moments' pause, she observed, "You were not long with Lady Florina to day."

"No, dear sister—because she also was expecting a visit from Mr. Gunthorpe. He had intimated his intention of calling in Cavendish Square at about three o'clock; and it appeared that Lady Florina was likewise to hear something of importance relative to him. I therefore limited my visit. Besides, dear Angela, I do not choose to leave you too much alone. But, Ah! there is another point in Mr. Gunthorpe's note to us, which has given me the most unfeigned delight—I mean his promise that Lady Macdonald and Florina shall call upon you here to-morrow, to make your acquaintance and embrace you as my sister. This will indeed be a happiness for me! You will love Florina——"

"Yes—for your sake as well as for her own, dear William. I am sure that the object of your love must be one meriting the highest esteem and admiration."

"Oh, she is! she is!" cried Deveril enthusiastically: "she is one of the few flowers that do not sicken and wither in the tainted atmosphere of fashionable life."

"Ah, that wicked Lady Saxondale," said Angela, "to have spread such a story concerning you! But what course is now to be adopted with regard to her?"

"Doubtless Mr. Gunthorpe will inform us presently," replied Deveril. "The matter rests entirely in his hands."

"Do you not wonder, William, how it is that our good old friend possesses such influence with Lady Macdonald? It must be as we have conjectured—that he is the very intimate friend of the Marquis of Eagledean."

"Yes—he himself has told me as much," replied Deveril. "But, Ah! here he is!" he ejaculated, as the sounds of carriage-wheels reached his ears through the open casement.

The brother and sister rose from their seats, and hastened to the front-door to meet the visitor, who proved to be the individual whom they were expecting. There were kind greetings and grasping of hands—and in a few moments the nobleman was seated between William and Angela in the elegantly furnished parlour. Now that the light of the lamp shone upon his features, they were both surprised as well as rejoiced to observe that he had an altered look,—but a look that was changed for the better. it was an expression of

countenance indicative of heartfelt satisfaction and joy.

"Ah! my dear young friends," he said, smiling upon them both, "you doubtless perceive some little alteration in me?—and it is so. Thank heaven, I find myself destined, in my declining years, to experience a happiness which for a long, long time past I had never dared hope to enjoy."

"You, Mr. Gunthorpe," said Angela, her sweet musical voice being tremulous with emotions,—"who are always studying to do good to others, richly deserve whatsoever happiness has now become your lot."

"And believe me, my dear Angela," responded the nobleman, "that in my own felicity I shall not forget the pleasing duty of ensuring the felicity of others. First with regard to yourself, William," he continued, now specially addressing himself to our young hero: "I must explain the measures which I have adopted to ensure your welfare. I have this day seen your Florina, and have told her many things with which she was previously unacquainted. Of some of those things her aunt Lady Macdonald was already aware, though she had kept them profoundly secret: but even she knew not all. Now they are both acquainted with everything that concerns me. In a few weeks, William, you shall conduct Florina to the altar. It is my purpose to settle upon you an income of two thousand a year——"

"No, Mr. Gunthorpe—impossible! impossible!" exclaimed William, well nigh overwhelmed by this surprising munificence. "I could not thus become dependant on your bounty. Pardon me, my dear sir, for speaking thus frankly—you will not attribute it to ingratitude on my part——"

"I attribute it to the proper feeling which inspires you, my young friend; and I honour you for it. But it suits my purpose and my intentions to give you this income. I will tell you why. Florina has certain claims upon me—and it is to her that I make this bequest. But as I cannot endure the idea of a husband being dependant on his wife, I choose to settle the money upon you instead of upon herself. Why, my dear boy, if you mean to marry a young lady of her rank, you must have a suitable income: and as for your toiling to earn a livelihood, it must not be thought of. You shall pursue your studies by way of amusement—and that is all. Now, don't interrupt me—I am doing everything for the best; and perhaps I shall tell you something presently which will show you that Florina has a perfect right to expect all this at my hands."

"My dear sir, I am at a loss for words," said William, profoundly affected, yet still loth to give an assent to the pecuniary arrangements proposed, —"I know not how to express myself——"

"But I can understand all that you would say," interrupted his good old friend. "And now, Angela," he continued, turning towards the young lady, adown whose cheeks the tears of mingled joy and gratitude were trickling;—for great indeed was that joy, and fervid also was that gratitude which she experienced towards the noble-hearted philanthropist who was displaying such splendid munificence towards her brother: "now, dear Angela," he said, "one word relative to yourself. Your engagement at the Opera was for one season—and that season is over. I dare say you have already had an offer from the manager to renew it for the following season—and doubtless plenty of offers from directors of the Continental Operas. But you will refuse each and all. At the same time you are not to be dependent upon your brother—although I know full well that everything he possesses is your's, and everything you possess is reciprocally his. But he and Florina must have their income to themselves; and you shall have your's. So you will permit me to settle upon you five hundred a-year——"

"Mr. Gunthorpe," interrupted the young lady, "so much bounty on your part——"

"Do not say a word!" he cried. "I am rich—this you knew all along—but I am far richer than you ever imagined. Had not my own circumstances altered in another sense—as I will presently explain—I should have done much more for Florina, whereby you, William, would have been benefited. Ah! now I perceive that you both are simultaneously struck with the same suspicion—you have penetrated the secret I was about to reveal to your ears—you see that I am no longer plain and humble Mr. Gunthorpe——"

"No, my lord," said William Deveril; "you are—you must be—the Marquis of Eagledean himself!"

As he thus spoke, our young hero rose from his chair with a feeling of profound respect towards that good nobleman: while, on the other side, Angela sank upon her knees, and taking his hand, murmured, "My lord, we cannot love or revere you more than if you had remained as we had hitherto known you!"

"My dear young friends," exclaimed the Marquis, compelling William to resume his seat on one side, and Angela to rise from her knees on the other,—"I have studied the excellence of your dispositions—I have marked the purity of your lives—and even if my duty towards my niece Florina had not impelled me to bestow a fortune to enable her to become your wife, William, I should nevertheless have given yourself and your amiable sister a proof of my regard. And now listen to me, while I relate many strange things: for I purpose to keep no secrets from you, as henceforth you will be welcome and honoured guests at my dwelling, and there are beings beneath that roof to whom I long to present you."

The Marquis of Eagledean then proceeded to relate the history of his love for Lady Everton, and most of those details which are already known to the reader. But we need scarcely observe that he did *not* draw aside the veil from those lamentable circumstances which entered into the past career of his daughter Elizabeth Paton; and with these exceptions, he recapitulated all the facts which have occupied so many of the previous chapters of our narrative. William and Angela listened with feelings of the deepest interest; and when the Marquis had concluded, they proffered their congratulations on his altered position in life, now that he had found two children whom he loved, and was on the eve of being united to the object of his first and only affections.

"William," continued the Marquis, "there is one more subject on which we have to converse. I allude to those proceedings that we have threatened

to take against Lady Saxondale. You are now aware that Lord Harold Staunton is my nephew. I more than fear—indeed, it is certain from what we already know—that this bad woman has contrived to obtain no small degree of influence over him. It is my duty as well as my wish to rescue him from the circle of her fascinations. But considering the empire which she must have gained over his heart, to have been enabled to make him her instrument in the endeavour to take away your life, it can only be by revealing her true character to him in the blackest dyes, that he may be weaned from his infatuation. I do not imagine that he is aware of the fact that she, for some deep and dark purposes of her own, was in correspondence with that dreadful character—the man Chiffin. It is necessary to ascertain for what purpose that man's services were required by her ladyship. Previous to leaving London, I sent a note to that man at the public-house in Agar Town, desiring him to let me know if anything new transpired in respect to Lady Saxondale, and telling him where he might send a letter to me. Of course I failed not to hint that his reward should be ample; and he has already had proofs that I am not niggard with my gold."

"And has he answered your lordship?" inquired Deveril: "have you heard anything from him?"

"This very afternoon, on my return home from Cavendish Square," replied the Marquis, "I found a note from Chiffin. In that scrawl he desires me, accompanied by yourself, to pay another visit to that den in Agar Town—to-morrow evening at nine o'clock—when he promises to have the most important information to communicate."

"Oh, my lord!" said Angela, over whose countenance a shade had fallen; "do you not fear to expose yourselves to the dangers of that horrible den, and to the possible treachery of that dreadful man?"

"My sweet girl," responded the Marquis, in a benevolent tone of reassurance and encouragement, "you have nothing to tremble for, either on the part of your brother or your old friend. The appointment is given for an hour when that place is frequented by a number of persons; and though they may be all bad characters, yet no outrage is ever attempted by a mixed company of that description. As for the man himself, money is his idol; and as he doubtless thinks that he will make a good thing out of me from first to last, he will not kill the goose in the hope of obtaining all the golden eggs at once. To-morrow," continued the Marquis, "Lady Macdonald and Florina will pay you a visit between two and three o'clock. At five my carriage will be here to fetch you both to dine with me at the Manor. I long to introduce you to Lady Everton—to Adolphus—to Elizabeth—and to Frank. Then, soon after eight, you and I, William, will repair to Agar Town. I shall devise some excuse: because no one at the Manor must be made acquainted with the real nature of the business we have in hand, or the place to which we are going. In respect to what concerns yourself and Lady Saxondale, William, we shall know how to act better after this interview with Chiffin to-morrow evening. The greater the mass of evidence we can accumulate against her, the more easily shall we reduce her to terms. My object, as you may now comprehend it, is a double one: namely, to rescue my nephew from her clutches—and likewise to compel her to contradict the foul calumny she has propagated in respect to yourself. We may then leave the vile bad woman to such chastisement as her own utter mortification will be certain to inflict. But as for this nephew of mine," added the Marquis, shaking his head gloomily, "from all I have seen and all I have heard, I deeply fear that he has become inveterate in the ways of vice and demoralization."

"Let us hope for the best, my lord," said Deveril. "You know that so far as I am concerned, I freely forgive him."

"Generous-hearted boy!" exclaimed Lord Eagledean: "I know that you have forgiven him long ago."

"And even if I had not," rejoined our hero, "it would be sufficient to have learnt that he is your lordship's nephew, to induce me to bury the past in oblivion."

The Marquis of Eagledean now rose to take his departure; and the brother and sister accompanied him forth into the little garden in front of the house. There his lordship took leave of Angela, shaking her warmly by the hand; and she retreated into the dwelling—for she perceived that the Marquis desired to say a few words in private with her brother. And it was so: for the nobleman, taking Deveril's arm, led him slowly towards the gate,—saying in a subdued voice, "William, you are now acquainted with all that has taken place between myself and Lady Everton. The world will perhaps look upon her past conduct as frailty and levity—and upon mine as that of a seducer. Now, my dear boy, I have invited yourself and Angela to my house to-morrow: but if you have the slightest hesitation to bring your beautiful sister in contact——"

"My lord, not another word, I beseech you, upon this subject!" interrupted Deveril. "At five o'clock Angela and myself will be prepared to wait upon your lordship, and all those whom we may find beneath your roof."

The Marquis said not another word—but pressed Deveril's hand cordially, and entering his carriage, drove homeward.

CHAPTER XCIV.

LOVE AFFAIRS.

About four o'clock in the afternoon of the following day, Francis Paton might have been seen walking alone in a distant part of the grounds attached to Stamford Manor. He had sought the shadiest spot, not so much because the sun was still powerful—but because he wished to escape the notice of any persons who might be roving about, and likewise to be left in the companionship of his own thoughts. The youth was full of a nervous anxiety: there was a flush upon his cheeks—the glitter of uneasy suspense in his eyes; and from time to time, when his ear caught a sound like that of an approaching footstep, he stopped and flung an eagerly penetrating look through the shrubs and evergreens in the direction of the mansion. Then, as he descried not the person whom he expected, he walked on again, murmuring to himself, "How long the interview lasts!"

Indeed, for an entire hour—since three o'clock—

had Francis Paton been walking to and fro in that shady retreat; and the interval which had elapsed appeared to him at least thrice as long. Twenty times had he looked at his watch — twenty times had he stopped short to glance in the direction of the Manor, and again and again did he murmur, "How long the interview lasts!"

But at length he beheld his sister advancing hastily towards the spot where he was awaiting her arrival; and perceiving that she came quickly, and not with a slow languid pace, his heart bounded with hope: for he thought within himself that she had pleasing tidings to communicate. As she approached nearer still, he saw in her looks sufficient to confirm this anticipation; and flying towards her, he exclaimed, "What news, dear Elizabeth? what does our father say?"

"We have both alike, my dear brother," she responded, "everything to hope."

A cry of joy burst from Frank's lips; and he embraced his sister with the warmest effusion of delight.

"Now tell me," he said, "everything that has taken place."

"Oh, then, dear Frank," she replied archly, and yet with a softly blushing confusion at the same time, "you will now have patience to listen to everything that I may have to say?"

"Yes," he answered; "provided that you have nothing of a disagreeable nature to quarry the joyous intelligence already communicated.

"I do not think you will find it so," she rejoined. "But first, dear Frank, I will speak of your own little love-affair. Come, let me take your arm—and we will walk to and fro beneath this grateful shade. I represented to our father frankly and candidly everything which had taken place between yourself and Miss Juliana Farefield, as you had previously related it all to me——"

"You told his lordship everything?" murmured Frank, half-averting his blushing countenance.

"Oh, yes!—did we not agree, when I undertook to become spokeswoman in the matter, that our father was to be dealt with frankly and unreservedly? Well then, my dear brother, I told him all; and at first he looked very grave and very serious, for more reasons than one——"

"And those reasons?" asked young Paton quickly.

"The first, as he explained them to me," continued Elizabeth, "was because he could not help thinking that it was a mere transient passion on Juliana's part: but yet he admitted that he might be mistaken."

"Oh! yes—he is mistaken!" ejaculated Frank vehemently: "for I know that she loves me; and were it not an egregious vanity on my part to use such terms, I should say that she loves me devotedly—adoringly!"

"So much the better, Frank—inasmuch as you, my dear brother, are so deeply enamoured of her. That however was one reason which made the Marquis look grave. The second is, because he has no reason to entertain any good feeling towards Juliana's mother, Lady Saxondale. On the contrary, there are certain circumstances, which he partly explained to me, and which have not only brought him already in collision with her, but now threaten to make a still wider breach between them. These circumstances relate to his nephew, Lord Harold—and to Mr. William Deveril, whom you have often seen, and who is coming to dine here to-day."

"But no matter for the circumstances, my dear sister," exclaimed Frank impatiently, "so long as our father has not placed his negative——"

"No, my dear brother—I have already assured you to the contrary. Now listen to what the Marquis says. He himself has experienced too bitterly the fatal effects of thwarting the heart's affections, to entertain the slightest idea of attempting a similar coercion with either of his children. No, no—he will not do that——not for worlds would he adopt a course by which he himself and our dear mother were rendered such cruel sufferers. He would rather strain many a point—rather make much sacrifice of feeling as a parent, than practise such tyranny—such cruelty. This therefore does he propose—that you shall put Juliana Farefield's love to the test: he himself will suggest the means, and sketch forth the plan to be adopted; and in three or four days shall you repair into Lincolnshire for the purpose."

"Oh, that condition I cheerfully accept!" exclaimed Frank; "and I feel deeply grateful to our father—deeply grateful to you also, my dearest sister——"

"No gratitude to me, Frank," interrupted Elizabeth. "Heaven grant that the result of the test, whatsoever it may be, shall prove in accordance with your hopes and aspirations! The reason that made me so long ere I rejoined you here, was because our father—after he had heard all that I had to say, both on your account and my own—proceeded to the drawing-room to consult our mother. Ah! you may suppose that during the twenty minutes I was left alone in the library, I endured some degree of suspense both for your sake and mine. And yet hope preponderated above fear: for the Marquis had listened to me with so much benevolence—with so much paternal kindness—he had encouraged me in such gentle and soothing terms to proceed each time I hesitated——in short, I saw full well that he would do all in his power to minister unto our happiness."

"And you were not mistaken, Elizabeth?" exclaimed Frank. "But in reference to yourself——"

"Our father will grant Don Diego Christoval an interview the day after to-morrow," answered Miss Paton, the rich blood again mantling upon her cheeks; "and I do not think there is any reason to apprehend an unsatisfactory termination to that meeting. To-morrow evening, you know, dear Frank," continued Elizabeth, speaking more seriously, "the hands of our father and mother will be united in the holy bond of marriage. The special license is already procured—the various arrangements are made. But these indeed are few, inasmuch as the ceremony will take place with the utmost privacy. Perhaps this marriage may be followed shortly by several others——"

"Oh!" cried Frank, in the sanguine enthusiasm of youthful years, "how delightful would it be if Adolphus and Henrietta—yourself and the Count—and, and——"

"Speak it out, my dear brother," said Elizabeth, with a smile upon her lips and a blush upon her cheeks: "Juliana and yourself——if we were all to be married on the same day——Well, we shall see."

"And now, dear sister, that you have at length learned what love is," continued Frank, "tell me, does it not constitute a new existence? is it not a paradise in itself? does it not seem to transport one, as it were, into another state of being? Oh, you who but so short a time back were almost boasting that your heart was inaccessible to love——why, I do really believe that all along, from the very first moment you ever beheld your handsome Christoval in the Catalonian hills, you really loved him: that is to say, the germs of love were engendered in your heart—but the circumstances not being congenial for their expansion and growth, they remained as it were latent, unknown, unsuspected—but not the less surely implanted there; and it only required a change of circumstances, such as those under which you and Don Diego recently met, to evoke these germs of love into active vitality and a recognised existence."

"There may be some truth in what you say, Frank," observed Elizabeth, in a subdued voice: "yes—there may be!"—and for a few moments she reflected profoundly upon the idea which he had suggested: then, suddenly raising her magnificent dark eyes which had been bent downward, she exclaimed with her wonted blitheness, "Come, Frank, we must hasten and dress for dinner. The Devereils and the Leydens are coming—and it will be a happy party."

The brother and sister sped back to the mansion; and it was indeed a happy party which was gathered in the splendid drawing-room at about six o'clock. William Deveril, who had seen Frank in his page's livery at Saxondale House, could not help thinking that handsome as he had looked *then*, he appeared to far greater advantage in his present elegant evening costume; and he shook hands with him in a manner so ingenuously cordial and warm, that it was as much as to imply the words, "We are bosom friends from this moment."

Angela,—who, in a plain white dress, looked ravishingly beautiful,—was heartily welcomed by Lady Everton; and she was soon on the most friendly terms with Elizabeth Paton and Henrietta Leyden. And here we may observe that it would have been difficult, if all England were searched through, to discover three more perfect specimens of female loveliness than Elizabeth, Angela, and Henrietta—or two handsomer youths than William Deveril and Francis Paton. But Adolphus—did he not also appear to advantage? Yes: and wonderfully improved was he alike in personal appearance and the tone of his intellect. Mrs. Leyden and little Charley were amongst the guests; and the sweet boy was full of the most joyous spirits. Altogether, we repeat, it was indeed a happy party.

Soon after eight o'clock the Marquis of Eagledean and William Deveril entered the carriage, which was in readiness, and which drove away in the direction of Agar Town.

"And so Florina and Angela at once became as affectionate as two sisters," observed the Marquis, referring to some conversation which had already taken place between himself and William Deveril in the course of the evening.

"Angela was delighted with Florina," answered our hero: "indeed, how could she be otherwise? for the heart which is all amiable and pure, is certain to love a being who is herself amiability and purity."

"No doubt of it," said the Marquis. "I was convinced they would immediately experience a fondness for one another. Florina was already much prepossessed in favour of your sister, and of course Angela was equally prepared to love the object of your affection. But Lady Macdonald—what think you of her?"

"Her ladyship was most amiable," replied William. "Altogether, both Angela and myself had every cause to be pleased and flattered by the visit. We are to dine in Cavendish Square the day after to-morrow."

"I know it: for we are to be there to meet you," replied his lordship. "Lady Everton will in the meanwhile have become Marchioness of Eagledean. Elizabeth and Adolphus will also be of the party."

"And Frank—your amiable son Frank?" asked William.

"He is going upon a journey, of which I will tell you more particulars another time. By the bye, I thought I had something to communicate, which perhaps is of more or less consequence: but whether it will prove so, we shall see. That woman whom you rescued from drowning, and who is to call at your residence in the evening of the 21st of this month, at nine o'clock——is it not so?"

"Yes, my lord: it was in the evening of the 21st of July that she gave the appointment that day month, hour for hour——Oh! I have not forgotten it: and often and often do I ask myself what secret she may have to reveal? or whether it were not all the outpouring of a half-crazed brain?"

"No—I do not think so," interrupted the Marquis. "From the particulars you narrated to me, I am inclined to anticipate that she will really have something of importance to communicate. But I was about to tell you something more concerning her. It happened that this afternoon my daughter Elizabeth had a conversation with me on certain matters regarding Frank, and in the course of what took place, she mentioned several little things which had occurred at Saxondale House during the last few weeks of his residence there. Amongst those occurrences, were certain visits, paid under very mysterious circumstances to Lady Saxondale, by a woman precisely answering the description of that same person whom you rescued from the River Trent."

"Ah! then doubtless she was on her way at the time to pay a visit to the Castle," exclaimed William Deveril. "I recollect that she spoke a great deal of Lady Saxondale. How peremptorily she demanded what I was doing in that neighbourhood! and how strangely she told me that if I myself had been to the Castle, it was somewhat important she should know it! I remember also that when I told her I had never set foot in Saxondale Castle in my life, she gave vent to such singular ejaculations, and looked at me with an expression of countenance that I never can forget. I besought her to explain herself: I told her that she was torturing me cruelly—that by her looks and her language she was piling up mystery upon mystery: and yet she would not relieve me from suspense. But this was not all. When I spoke of those overtures which Lady Sax-

sendale had made to me, she adjured me in the most solemn manner to tell her the truth—whether I had really rejected them? Then how suddenly satisfied and even pleased did she seem when I gave her a positive answer!"

"It is strange—most strange," said the Marquis of Eagledean, in a musing tone. "No conjecture can possibly penetrate that woman's meaning, or fathom the mystery. But still those visits which she paid to Saxondale House—for there can be no mistake as to the identity of the woman whom Frank saw, with that of the woman of whom you are speaking,—those visits, I say, would seem to show that she has some intimate knowledge of Lady Saxondale's affairs; and hence her perseverance in questioning you. Yes, William—there is evidently some profound and important secret which your poor father vainly endeavoured to reveal on his death-bed—which the manager Thompson was likewise acquainted with—and of which this singular woman has some inkling. Well, the 21st is not very far distant now; and then we shall see whether the woman will keep the appointment. I have promised to be with you at the time, my dear William—and I shall not fail. But here we are at the spot where I bade the coachman halt."

CHAPTER XCV.

THE SHARK.

The carriage had stopped in the same place where the Marquis of Eagledean and William Deveril had alighted on the former occasion of their visit to Agar Town; and the coachman being ordered to wait their return, they proceeded towards Solomon Patch's boozing-ken. On reaching the entrance of that establishment, the uproarious sounds of mirth and revelry rang forth even louder than usual; and on crossing the threshold, the visitors perceived the landlord and his better half serving malt and spirituous liquor to the ill-looking persons gathered about the bar. It was from the taproom that the din of voices emanated; and the whole conversation of the revellers there appeared to be made up of oaths, obscenities, slang songs, and ribald jests.

The moment the Marquis and William Deveril made their appearance, Solomon Patch, evidently prepared for their arrival, stepped forward to receive them with his usual cringing servility, and inducted them into the little parlour behind the bar. He officiously handed them chairs; and bustling about, drew a bottle of wine and put some glasses on the table, before they had leisure to utter a word, much less give a specific order for any refreshment, even if they had required it.

"Is a certain person here?" asked the nobleman, with a significant look at Solomon Patch.

"Yes, he be, sir," was the reply, "Mr. Chiffin, who is a genelmen of the greatest punctuality, and never keeps nobody waiting for nothing whatsumdever, will show the light of his blessed countenance in less than five minutes."

"You seem to have a great deal of custom here," remarked Lord Eagledean, perceiving that the landlord lingered in the room, and not choosing to be uncivil to him.

"Well, sir, me and my missus is plain simple bodies—say-nothing-to-nobody kind of folks; and as long as we can earn our honest crustesses for tea, dinner, and breakfastesses, we don't grumble. We pays the Queen's taxes as regular as clock-work: but we don't pay no water-rates, cos why there's no water laid on the place. The canal, you see, sir, is so precious handy."

"Very handy, indeed," said the Marquis drily: then, as a sudden reminiscence flashed to his mind, sending a cold shudder through his entire form at the same time, he observed, "By the bye, that dreadful murder which was committed close by here—in the barge, I mean,—has any clue been ever discovered to the perpetrator of the deed?"

"Never, sir, that I've heard of," replied Solomon Patch, without the slightest change of countenance; although he knew full well that the murderer was beneath his roof at that very moment—and what was more too, that he was deliberately and coolly planning another double murder for the hour that was passing.

At this moment the door opened; and Chiffin the Cannibal made his appearance. He took off his battered old white hat surrounded with the rusty black crape, and made what he intended to be a respectful-looking bow to the two visitors. Solomon Patch glided back into the bar; and Chiffin, closing the door, took a seat opposite to the Marquis and Deveril.

"So you got my note, Mr. Gunthorpe?" he said, with a significant nod, as much as to imply that it was very important business to which it related.

"That is the reason we are here this night, and at this hour," replied the Marquis. "I suppose you have something to communicate concerning Lady——"

"Hush, sir—hush!" said Chiffin, turning round and looking towards the door. "That old Patch and his wife," he continued, in a subdued voice, "have got ears as sharp as their eyes; and I do believe they can see through a brick wall. I wouldn't for the world have them know what you've come here about: they would fasten themselves upon me till they got out of me every farthing of the couple of hundred guineas you're going to give me."

"Humph!" said the Marquis drily: "you have fixed your price beforehand?"

"Rather so," responded Chiffin, with a cunning leer; "because I know the value of the information I am going to give you. Why, sir, I've got two letters——But I'm blowed if we can talk here," he added, again affecting to look uneasily around. "I know old Sol and his wife are pricking up their ears."

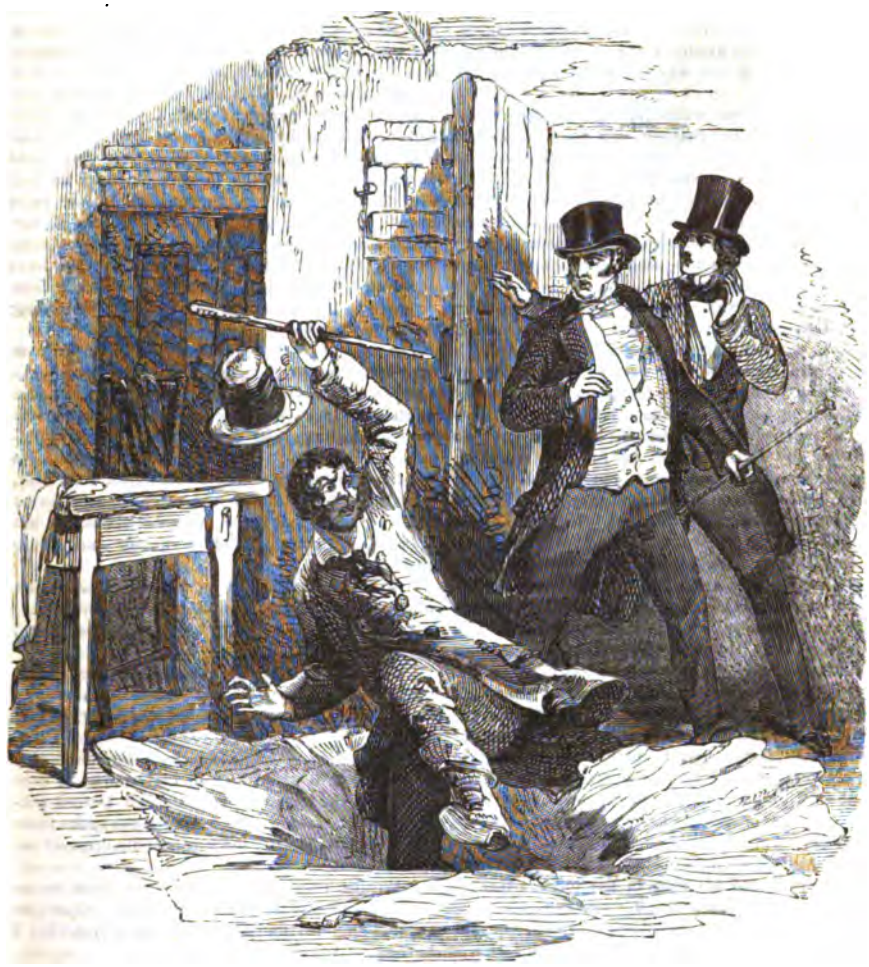
"Then why did you make an appointment for us to meet you here?" demanded Lord Eagledean.

"Cos why I didn't know another crib where two genelmen could meet a chap like me without exciting unpleasant notice. Besides, I live here——"

"Ah! you live here?" said the Marquis.

"Why yes—I've got a room of my own," observed Chiffin; "and a very tidy sitting apartment up-stairs it is too. But come, before we go any farther, is it all right about the blunt?"

"If you mean the money," rejoined the Marquis, "I have enough about me to satisfy your demand. Have you not already had proofs of my liberality? Depend upon it, I will give you a fair price for your letters."



Chiffin reflected for a few moments. He had been driving at a particular object: namely, to get as much as he could out of the two persons before he consigned them to destruction. His rapacity almost prompted him to be more explicit and eager in his demand; but he feared that if he were to display such greediness, a suspicion would be excited in their minds; for they would naturally argue that if he could transact the money-part of the business in the bar-parlour, he could likewise show them the letters in the same place. He accordingly resolved not to risk the two thousand guineas which he was to receive from Lady Saxondale, by any farther angling for the two hundred that he sought to obtain of his intended victims.

"Well then, genelmen," he said, suddenly rising from his seat, "let's to business:"—then pretending to look anxiously over the blind of the window between the parlour and the bar, he again turned towards them, observing in a lower tone, "I knew they were on the watch. Come along with me."

Thus speaking, Chiffin took up a candle; and opening the door, led the way towards the staircase.

"Shall I send the wine and glasses up, Mr. Chiffin?" asked old Solomon, by way of giving a complexion of fairness to the present proceeding.

"Yes, you may as well—and some brandy too, for that matter," responded the Cannibal. "Come along, genelmen—this way."

For a moment William Deveril clutched the arm of the Marquis, and threw upon him a significant look,—not one of actual fear, for our hero was no craven-hearted being—but one full of suspicion as to the integrity of Chiffin's intentions. This removal from one room to another had struck him as being strange. The same idea had occurred to the Marquis himself; and the look which he threw back

upon Deveril, implied the necessity of exercising the utmost caution. But then it simultaneously occurred to them both that as all the lower part of the house was full of people, it was by no means probable that any foul play could be intended them. They accordingly ascended the stairs, Chiffin the Cannibal leading the way with the light in his hand.

That little room which has been so frequently alluded to in former chapters, was reached; and as there seemed to be nothing suspicious there—no place where any murderous confederates of their guide could be concealed in ambush—the Marquis and Deveril did not hesitate to enter it. Still they were on the alert, and kept at a certain distance behind Chiffin, so as to guard against any sudden manifestation of treachery.

"This is my room, genelmen," he said, throwing open that new door which had been constructed; then, as he paused on the threshold, the light which he held in his hand as well as one that was already burning on the table, affording them a full view of the interior, he added, "You see it's no great shakes—only just comfortable; and it's here I'm going to transact my little business in future. Walk in, genelmen—and I will show you these letters at once. We will then settle what they're worth over the lush that old Sol Patch will bring up in a moment."

Despite his villanous-looking countenance, there was a certain degree of frankness and straightforward meaning in this speech of the Cannibal's, which almost completely reassured the Marquis and Deveril. They had moreover looked into the inner room—they saw nothing suspicious—the outer door had been left wide open—and the merest cry would be heard down stairs. Assuredly, then, Chiffin was acting fairly, and there was no perfidy to apprehend?

Deveril was the first to make a movement to follow the Cannibal; for he was resolved that if any traitorous intent should suddenly develop itself, he would be the foremost to bear its brunt, and to the extent of his power shield and protect his benefactor the Marquis of Eagledean. Chiffin, with the candle in one hand and his club in the other, advanced across the room from the new doorway towards the table, which stood against the opposite wall. Deveril had just crossed the threshold—the Marquis was close at hand—when all of a sudden the floor appeared to give way beneath Chiffin's feet, the carpet sinking down at the same time: a horrible yell burst from his lips—the candle and the club fell from his hands—and in the twinkling of an eye he disappeared from the view. But where he had gone down, and the carpet with him, a square chasm remained open in the floor—black and yawning, as if it were the bottomless pit itself!

William Deveril and the Marquis of Eagledean recoiled in dismay from the astounding spectacle. Horror seized upon them with paralysing effect, rendering them speechless; and there they stood for a few moments, gazing in the stupor of consternation upon the open trap-door through which the Cannibal had disappeared, as if having sold his soul to Satan, his time had come and an abyss had yawned to swallow him up.

Suddenly recovering their presence of mind, the Marquis and Deveril exchanged looks of unutterable horror; and then they turned to flee from a place where such hideous pitfalls appeared to have existence. Be it understood that the candle which remained burning upon the table in the inner room (that which Chiffin had carried being extinguished as it fell) not merely lighted the scene of horror in the immediate vicinage, but also threw its beams into the smaller room where Lord Eagledean and Deveril now were. But on turning towards the outer door, they perceived that it was shut. This had been done by old Solomon Patch, who had stolen up-stairs just at the very time they were following Chiffin into the inner room; and he had shut that outer door to prevent whatsoever cries might be uttered, from reaching the ears of the people down stairs. And here we may at once observe that Chiffin's yell could scarcely have penetrated beyond that door; or if it did, it was drowned in the uproarious din of revelry thundering forth from the tap-room.

The instant that the Marquis and Deveril, on turning round to flee from the place, beheld the outer door closed, they again threw rapid and unutterable looks upon each other—as much as to imply that there was some hideous treachery impending. Our young hero, seising upon a huge wooden stool, was about to batter down that door,—taking it for granted, in the hurry and excitement of his thoughts, that it was fast secured outside: but it suddenly opened, and a female made her appearance.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, as he recognised the woman whom he had saved from drowning in the Trent; but she placed her finger to her lips, and he uttered not another word.

"Silence!" said Madge Somers—for she it was; "you have nothing to fear:"—and as she spoke, she entered the room, closing the door behind her.

The Marquis of Eagledean, from the description which had been given him of this woman, at once knew who she was; and both he and Deveril perceived by her manner, even before she spoke those reassuring words, that she was friendly disposed towards them.

"Do not excite yourselves—there must be no disturbance," she hastened to observe. "That pitfall was intended for you—yes, both of you—but I have saved you."

With an impulsive feeling of fervid gratitude, which was indeed natural enough under such extraordinary circumstances, Deveril caught the woman by one hand—the Marquis by the other; and those hands were fervidly pressed.

"My good woman," said Lord Eagledean, "we owe you our lives—we understand it all—that miscreant lured us hither to accomplish our destruction—you have saved us—your reward shall be immense——"

"Do not speak so loud," interrupted Madge Somers: and her words were uttered in that peremptory tone of command which she was so accustomed to adopt. "The people below must know nothing of what has happened."

"But it is impossible to pass over the transaction thus!" cried the Marquis. "Such a horribly treacherous contrivance could not exist here without the knowledge of the vile wretches who keep the place. They must be given up to justice."

"Silence, Mr. Gunthorpe—I command you!"

said Madge Somers, planting her right foot foremost and assuming an attitude that was alike one of dominant command and stern menace. "I have saved your lives—you acknowledged but a few moments back how much you were indebted to me. The least you can do to testify your gratitude, is to follow my counsel. I say, therefore, that there must be secrecy upon this subject: not a single syllable respecting the transaction of this night must pass the lips of either of you! I have saved your lives, I repeat: would you endanger mine? And what would my life be worth, if you blazoned all this forth to the world? Patch and his wife might go to the gallows: but would the law do nothing to *me?* Though Chiffin was a villain—a robber—a murderer ——aye, you may start: he *was* a murderer—and he would have been a murderer again to-night if it had not been for me! But though he was all this, yet I had no right to murder *him*—which I have done to save *you both*. The law might not hang me, considering the circumstances: but it would transport me; and a sentence of transportation would be death, because I would commit suicide! Even if I were pardoned, my life would not be worth a month's purchase. Chiffin has friends—the Patches have friends—and I should be waylaid—I should be assassinated by the sharp knife of vengeance. Now do you understand me, Mr. Gunthorpe? do you understand me, William Deveril? In a word, I have saved *your* lives: do you wish to take *mine?*"

Both the Marquis of Eagledean and our young hero recognised the stern truth of all the arguments which Madge Somers advanced; and though they experienced an indescribable repugnance to throw the veil of darkness over this terrible proceeding, yet on the other hand they dared not perpetrate such monstrous ingratitude as to endanger the life of the woman who had saved theirs.

"You will follow my counsel?" repeated Madge Somers, her naturally harsh and forbidding countenance looking terrible in the present resoluteness of its expression: indeed there appeared to be an iron firmness about this woman—an even more than masculine decision of purpose, which had the effect of overawing the strongest and proudest minds.

"We will do nothing to hurt you," said the Marquis of Eagledean: "no—not for worlds would we be guilty of ingratitude!"

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated William Deveril."

"It is well," observed Madge Somers: "I believe you—I put faith in you both; and therefore I exact not any solemn pledge or vow. In a few instants you shall depart. But stay—let us assure ourselves that the miscreant has met his righteous doom."

Thus speaking, Madge Somers passed into the inner room; and making a slight circuit, so as to avoid the gaping chasm, she took up the candle from the table: then advancing to the very edge of the abyss, she stooped over, holding the candle above her head so as to obtain a greater benefit from the light.

"All dark—as dark as pitch," she muttered: "a thousand candles would not throw a single beam down to the bottom:"—then she paused and listened for nearly a minute. "All is still too—as still as death," she said, turning away from the chasm, over which she had bent so far and so fearlessly that both Deveril and the Marquis shuddered lest she should lose her balance and tumble in.

It was therefore quite a relief to them both—and they breathed freely once more—when she moved away from the edge of the pitfall.

"Now, my good woman," said the Marquis, "heaven knows that we shall be full well pleased to escape from this den of horrors: but in the first place I wish to ask you one or two questions—and in the second place you must allow me to give you such reward as what I have about me will enable me to offer."

"The questions first. Go on," said Madge, curtly and peremptorily.

"Know you at whose instigation that miscreant"—and the Marquis of Eagledean pointed towards the dark yawning gulf—"sought our lives?"

"Perhaps I do," answered Madge: "but the time is not come to satisfy you on this point. In short, I cannot be questioned now: I will not be! On the 21st of this month—and it is not many days hence—I have an appointment to keep; and it shall be kept. Therefore say not another word: you must depart—and I also am in a hurry to be gone."

"Here, my good woman—here!" said the Marquis, forcing upon her a purse well crammed with bank-notes at one end and with gold at the other. "Take this—take this. I shall see you again on the 21st, and will give you more."

But Madge Somers hesitated to accept the nobleman's bounty; and therefore have we used the term that it was *forced* upon her. What strange feeling was it—or what idiosyncracy—that made this woman hesitate to receive that purse?—she who was penniless at the moment—she who was ever ready to clutch greedily at the means of gratifying her infatuation for the gaming-table—she who throughout a long series of years had existed upon the proceeds of crime, robbery, and extortion—she who in a word had never scrupled at any deed of turpitude to obtain gold,—how was it that *she* hesitated? Ah! there was some strange thought uppermost in her mind—some remorseful sentiment—some compunctious feeling: for there are moments in the lives of even the vilest and the worst of human creatures, when the heart is thus touched and the soul thus moved. Such are the inscrutable dispensations of heaven! such the mysteries of the character of mankind! And this woman, whose soul was saturated with vice—tanned, hardened, iron-bound, petrified, steeled, by a long career of guilt and enormity—this woman whose life had been dragged through all the moral sinks, cesspools, heaps of feculence, sloughs of mire, bogs, morasses, and accumulated abominations which abound in this great metropolis of our's,—this woman it was that now hesitated to accept that purse! Strange indeed was her look as she fixed her eyes upon William Deveril, and then reverted them upon the countenance of the Marquis.

"Yes, yes," said the nobleman; "you must take that money: and I will give you more—much more the next time we meet."

Madge Somers weighed the purse in her hand—then opened it—drew forth a single gold piece—still clutched it—still hesitated—and at length all in a moment thrust it back upon the Marquis,

saying in her habitually curt manner, "No, Mr. Gunthorpe, I will not take it. And now begone, both of you—begone, I say! But once more beware how you breathe a single word of aught that has taken place here to-night. Begone!"—and she extended her arm in a commanding manner towards the outer door.

"But my good woman," said William Deveril, "we cannot leave you thus. You have saved our lives—you must accept a reward."

"No—nothing more than what I have taken:"—and she displayed the piece of gold. "Why should you throw temptation in my way?" she demanded, almost fiercely. "Do you know what I should do if I were possessed of that money? I should speed with it to the gambling-table——Ah! you may both look startled, and shocked, and astonished—but it is the truth! And were I to hasten thither, I should be neglecting a duty which I owe to you, William Deveril. And now, not another word—depart—begone!"

Lord Eagledean and our young hero, astonished at what they heard—astonished likewise at the singular character and conduct of this unaccountable woman, hesitated no longer to obey her; but issued from the room. The staircase was quite dark—but they groped their way down it; and the moment they appeared in front of the bar, both Solomon Patch and his wife were seized with a ghastly terror. Neither the Marquis nor William Deveril tarried to speak a word: they merely threw a look of mingled indignation and loathing upon the two wretches, and issued from that den of infamy and horror.

The moment they had disappeared from the view of Solomon Patch and his wife, these two exchanged deeply significant looks, in which suspense, consternation, and bewilderment were all blended. Then the man in a hurried whisper bade his wife compose her looks and go on serving the customers, while he sped up-stairs to learn what had taken place: for neither he nor Mrs. Patch could possibly conceive by what means the two visitors had come off in safety. Had the plot failed? were they gone to give information to the authorities? or had Chiffin concluded a better money-bargain than that which had originally instigated him to the concoction of the snare?

Speeding up the staircase, three steps at a time, Solomon Patch found Madge Somers bending over the open trap-door. But where was Chiffin? The look which the old landlord flung hastily around, encountered not the form of the Cannibal.

"Ah! is that you?" said Madge.

"Yes. But where is Chiffin?"

"There!"—and she pointed down into the pit.

"There?" echoed Solomon: and starting back, he gazed in bewilderment upon the woman.

"Yes—there!" she answered coldly. "Chiffin was caught in his own trap. It gave way as he was passing over it."

"Ah!" cried Solomon, not for an instant doubting the truth of this explanation, which indeed appeared so rational and so feasible.

"He is done for," said Madge, still bending over the abyss. "There is not a splash in the water—there is not a movement—there is not the slightest sound of a struggle. Nor was there from the very first."

"Well," mused Solomon Patch, in an audible tone—though not exactly intending to address his observations to Madge Somers,—"I don't know, arter all, that it's such a very bad job. Chiffin was getting a regular devil: he had got us all under his thumb—we didn't dare say as how our souls was our own—and as for poaching agin him, that was out of the question; cos why he knowed too much of *us* for us to tell what we knowed of *him*. So, arter all, perhaps it's for the best. It's a hill wind that blows no good to nobody."

"You are not altogether wrong, Sol," replied Madge Somers, well pleased in her heart to find that the old landlord took the occurrence in this philosophic light. "But I say, we had better pull this trap up; and then it would be as well just to go and cover the mouth of the well with the big stones, for fear of an accident happening to anybody else."

"Yes, yes—have it all your own way, Madge," ejaculated Solomon. "But them two gen'lemen——"

"You have nothing to fear. I pitched them a beautiful tale, that has made them quite comfortable. Hold your tongue about what has taken place—and don't for the world let any of the pals know what has happened to Chiffin. In a few days, when they miss him, you can say that he's wanted on account of that affair in the barge, and that he's keeping himself scarce."

"All right, Madge," rejoined Solomon, from whose mind an immense weight had been lifted by the assurance that the two visitors were not going to adopt any ulterior measures that might draw down the vengeance of the law upon himself and his establishment. "But how about raising this here trap-door?"

"There's a bit of string to lift it," said Madge; "and the bolt will hold it fast. But it won't do to walk over it," she continued, by way of giving a colour to the tale she had already told; "for fear it should yield as it did under Chiffin's feet."

As she thus spoke, she stooped down—seized hold of the cord—and drew up the trap-door, which, catching with a spring-bolt, remained fixed in its setting. She then took the light from the table, and descended the stairs, accompanied by Solomon Patch. They passed into the scullery together, closing the door behind them; and there, bending over the brink of the well, Madge listened once more with suspended breath. She likewise endeavoured to throw the light of the candle down into the black depth—but without success: the inky darkness absorbed the feeble glimmerings of that light.

"All still!" she said to the landlord. "What's the depth of that well?"

"About twenty feet," he replied.

"And the depth of the water?"

"When Chiffin measured it with plummet and cord t'other day, there was about six feet of water."

"Ah! then he was drowned in no time," observed Madge: and placing the candle upon the ground, she said, "Now let's put some of these big stones over the mouth."

Solomon Patch aided her in the task, which was soon accomplished; and the opening was completely closed by the flags which they placed upon it.

"Now, the best thing you can do," said Madge

Somers, "is to get a carpenter to put your house to rights again, and secure that trap-door: for if you or your wife happen to walk in your sleep, it will be rather an unpleasant business."

Having thus spoken, the woman took her departure from the boozing-ken, the landlord of which returned to his wife in the bar, to take the first opportunity of giving her an account of all that had occurred.

CHAPTER XCVI.

THE ENAMOURED SQUIRE.

We must now return to Saxondale Castle. Three weeks had elapsed since the accident with Mr. Hawkshaw's spirited steed which had happened to Lord Harold Staunton. He had remained confined to his room for several days, at the termination of which he announced himself as being perfectly restored to health and strength; and though he had since frequently complained of pains in the back and limbs, yet it was sufficiently evident that no serious consequences were to be apprehended. He continued to reside at the Castle, notwithstanding his aunt and sister had taken their departure; and it began to be whispered amongst the domestics that he was to marry Lady Saxondale. It was known that the contemplated alliance between Lord Saxondale and Lady Florina Staunton had been suddenly broken off, and that Edmund had accompanied his guardian Lord Petersfield on the special mission with which that nobleman was charged to the Imperial Court of Vienna.

Meanwhile Squire Hawkshaw had continued unremitting in his attentions to Juliana Farefield,—not only unremitting, but, if possible, doubling them. He was completely infatuated with that superb creature; and she took good care to retain him captive in the snares wherewith she had caught him. He was a constant visitor at the Castle, and every day was seen walking or riding out with Juliana. Still he had not as yet formally proposed for her hand. Be it remembered that he had firmly resolved to allow at least a month to elapse from the night of the ball at the Denisons' ere he confessed his passion and proffered his suit. It had cost him many an effort to keep back the tender avowal: but he had succeeded in doing so, under the impression that it would not be delicate or proper to manifest precipitation in such a case. The month however had now drawn to a close. It was in the middle of July when the Denisons' ball took place: it was now the middle of August—and Mr. Hawkshaw hailed with delight the termination of the interval which he had imposed upon himself as a period of preliminary wooing.

But did Juliana ever think of Francis Paton? Yes: she was constantly devouring him, as it were, with all the intense fervour of her sensuous nature. The image of that beautiful youth was always uppermost in her mind; and when alone she revolved a thousand schemes for the gratification of her passion after the ceremony of marriage with Mr. Hawkshaw should have furnished a cloak for her proceedings. She determined, as soon as convenient and practicable after the nuptial ceremony, to adopt some measures to bring Francis into the neighbourhood. Might she not manage to introduce him as a page into Hawkshaw Hall, when she should become the mistress of that establishment? or might she not secrete him at some humble but respectable dwelling in the neighbourhood, so that she might see him frequently and under circumstances of proper precaution? She did not entertain the slightest feeling of affection for Mr. Hawkshaw: she only received his addresses and purposed to accept him as a husband to suit her own selfish views. She wanted an established position — she wanted to separate from a mother whom she regarded with mistrust, aversion, and every feeling that was different from respect and veneration — she wanted also the means and opportunity of indulging her licentious passion for young Paton. But did she therefore love Frank in reality? The feeling she experienced for him she regarded as love—but it would be desecrating that pure and hallowed sentiment to affirm that it *was* a true and genuine love which fanned those devouring fires in the heart of Juliana Farefield. It was a fervid passion—but not a real love: it was a feeling of the sense, and not a sentiment: it fed upon the gross aliment of hot desire, and not upon the sweet manna of chaste and hallowed reflections. Had she really loved him in the true meaning of the term, she would have flown in the face of the world to become his wife, even while he was the humble and obscure page—she would have set at defiance all the conventionalisms of society in order to ensure her own happiness and prove her devoted affection for its object. Therefore it was not a genuine sentiment which Juliana experienced towards Francis Paton—but a passion consisting only of a gross sensuality.

The time having now come, as we have above stated, for Mr. Hawkshaw to make a formal offer of his hand to Juliana, he resolved to avail himself of the first opportunity. This was easily found: for Juliana was enabled to be as much alone with him and as often as she thought fit. Lady Saxondale interfered not with her: while she on the other hand interfered not with her mother and Lord Harold Staunton.

It was a gorgeous morning in the middle of August,—the sun pouring its flood of unclouded effulgence upon the old castle, the river, and the surrounding scenery,—when Mr. Hawkshaw conducted Juliana forth at about eleven o'clock to walk in the garden. She had thrown on a simple straw bonnet, with a light scarf over her shoulders; and she looked most enchantingly handsome. With all the natural keenness of her penetration, she had at once discovered by Mr. Hawkshaw's manner that the wished-for moment was now at hand. The flush of anticipated success and triumph was upon her cheeks, mantling richly through the delicate olive of her complexion; and the light of joy danced in her magnificent dark eyes, brighter than if it were the sun's beams that were reflecting there. Her hair for the morning-toilet was arranged in massive bands; and though she and her admirer sought the shadiest avenue in the garden, yet the entire atmosphere so permeated with the gorgeous sunlight, that the luxuriant masses of that raven hair shone with the richest gloss. There was a dewy moisture too upon her lips, which made them look redder than any one of the blushing roses which

embowered the path sought by herself and her admirer—and riper than any luscious fruit that hung to the garden-trees. Though the morning-dress that she wore ascended to the throat, thus concealing the grand contours of her bust, yet was the swell of her bosom indicated by the rising and falling of the *corsage* of that white drapery; and its heavings could be felt by her companion's arm as she leant upon it. Her looks — her air — her demeanour — her brilliant beauty,—everything about her, in fine, was but too well calculated to rivet the chains which she had forged around the heart of George Hawkshaw; and if he had ever hesitated to propose himself as her husband,—which assuredly he had not,—he could no longer have possibly hesitated now.

"Miss Farefield," he said, after the exchange of some casual and indifferent observations, "I have made up my mind——I have determined——to——to speak to you this morning on a subject closely regarding my happiness——"

"Indeed, Mr. Hawkshaw?" she observed murmuringly, at the same time affecting the most delicious confusion.

"Yes, Miss Farefield——Juliana——dear Juliana!" he exclaimed, gazing upon her in rapture: "can you not comprehend me? I am not a man accustomed to make flattering speeches — I am frank-hearted and ingenuous——such I believe is my nature——but if you will accept the hand, as you already possess the love, of one who will make your happiness the study of his life, that individual now kneels at your feet!"

And suiting the action to the word, George Hawkshaw did fall upon one knee; and taking the lady's hand, he pressed it to his lips. She murmured some words which were half choked by the enthusiastic feelings of triumph and success which agitated in her bosom, and which the unsophisticated admirer attributed to a maidenly confusion. Encouraged and delighted by those few murmuring words, and by the manner in which they were uttered, he started up from his knee—and gazing with renewed rapture upon her downcast blushing countenance, he said, "Tell me, Juliana—tell me—will you be mine?"

"I will," she responded, still faintly and tremulously; and Hawkshaw, flinging his arms around her, strained her superb form to his breast — at the same time covering her warm glowing cheeks with fervid caresses.

"You will be mine?" he said in exultant tones: "this is the fulfilment of the dearest hope I ever cherished in my life! O Juliana, you cannot conceive the joy that you have poured into my heart! And let me tell you that it is the heart of an honest man which you possess—a heart that never loved before—a heart that is your's, and your's only. Give me your arm, dear Juliana—and let us walk here together for a little while. I feel that I could become eloquent to a degree in promising all that I will do to ensure your happiness; and I am confident that you will reciprocate this strenuous endeavour on my part. We are not mere children, Juliana—we understand our own feelings—and what we promise we know that we shall perform. On my side there is the fullest confidence that I shall be happy with you: tell me, dear Juliana, that you feel an equally strong conviction of being happy with me?"

For a moment Miss Farefield's heart was smitten with remorse at the idea of the basely treacherous part which she was playing towards a man who addressed her in such honest terms and in such noble language. But that compunctious feeling quickly passed away—her selfishness became paramount once more—and the words to which she gave utterance, were spoken with every appearance of a congenial frankness and candour.

"My dear George, I have loved you from the first moment we met at Mr. Denison's. Perhaps I may even admit that on former occasions when in Lincolnshire, I did not behold you with indifference——"

"Oh, Juliana! is this possible? may I flatter myself that it is so?"—and the confiding noble-hearted Hawkshaw again spoke with exultant enthusiasm.

"It is true, dear George—it is true—most true," murmured the artful Juliana, appearing to be plunged into the modest confusion of a maiden from whose lips an avowal of the heart's feelings is elicited by the influence of sincerest love.

Mr. Hawkshaw was overjoyed by that assurance, which he firmly believed: for what will not a man believe when he is lip-deep in love, and when the things which he is called upon thus to put faith in, are so intimately connected with that love of his? He and Juliana continued to walk together for three whole hours, until the bell rang for luncheon. Those were three hours of elysian bliss to the fine-hearted Squire; and they afforded Juliana an opportunity for setting to work all the tactics of the most delicate *finesse*. She had not only won the love of the Squire—but also his implicit confidence. It was her purpose to retain both, though all the while resolving to deceive him. She had to affect a passion which she did not feel: but this she did the more easily, because while responding to her admirer in the language of love, she pictured to herself that it was Frank Paton to whom she was speaking. Thus substituting the image of Frank in its youthful, delicate, and almost effeminate beauty, for the image of George Hawkshaw in its fine handsome manliness, she contrived to speak more from the heart than she would otherwise have been enabled to do. And when Hawkshaw's arm encircled her waist, she tutored her fancy to believe that it was young Paton's; and she felt a thrill of sensuous ecstacy sweep fervid and glowing through her entire form. And when too Mr. Hawkshaw pressed his lips to her's, it was still in imagination young Frank's mouth that thus grew to her own; and as the boiling blood ran like lightning through her veins, the effect was to impart a more rapturous fervour to her kisses.

At length the summons for luncheon, ringing forth from the belfry over the entrance-tower, sprinkled the hot stagnant air with its metallic sounds; and Mr. Hawkshaw led back his intended into the Castle. After the repast the Squire requested a private interview with Lady Saxondale—which was of course immediately accorded: for her ladyship had received a rapidly whispered hint from Juliana to the effect that she had received an offer of Mr. Hawkshaw's hand. Lady Saxondale led the way to the library; and there, without much circumlocution, the Squire informed her of the step he had taken, and requested her assent to the match.

Lady Saxondale, playing the maternal part to perfection, represented how dear to her was the welfare of her elder daughter — how jealously she had watched over that beloved child's happiness—how pleased and gratified she was to think that her darling Juliana had won the esteem and affection of so worthy a gentleman as Mr. Hawkshaw—and how cheerfully she (Lady Saxondale) gave her consent to the alliance.

The speech was altogether a very beautiful one, eminently touching and pathetic: the only misfortune was the utter hollowness of the sentiments themselves and the guileful hypocrisy of the lips from which they came. However, Mr. Hawkshaw regarded it as a genuine outpouring of maternal love and affection; and taking her ladyship's hand, he pressed it to his lips in token of gratitude for her kindness in consenting to part with such a matchless treasure as her daughter Juliana.

"I avail myself of this opportunity, Mr. Hawkshaw," said Lady Saxondale, "to make you in return a certain communication—which indeed I am bound to make, now that you will so soon become one of the family. You must have perceived that Lord Harold Staunton entertains a most affectionate regard towards me; and I do not know that there is any indiscretion in avowing that I reciprocate his love. He has offered me his hand. I have spoken to him most seriously on the subject. I have bade him remember that there is a considerable disparity in our years; and I have besought him to study his heart well ere receiving an affirmative answer from my lips. He has replied with all suitable frankness and candour. In a word, therefore, I propose to consult my own happiness by accompanying Lord Harold Staunton to the altar."

"I congratulate your ladyship," answered Mr. Hawkshaw, "upon a prospect which, from all that you have said, is so well calculated to consolidate your happiness. From what I have seen of Lord Harold, I have every reason to admire and like him. But when once you have obtained the influence of a wife over his lordship," added the Squire, with a good-natured smile, "I hope you will prevent him from mounting strange horses and taking daring leaps."

"Depend upon it, my dear Mr. Hawkshaw," answered Lady Saxondale, while a blush rose to her cheeks; "that I value his life too much to permit him to risk it again in so venturesome a manner."

The Squire took leave of her ladyship, and then proceeded to bid farewell to Juliana also: for he had some important business to transact at Gainsborough that afternoon, and had ordered the groom at the Castle to have his horse in readiness at three o'clock. It was now close upon that hour; and therefore the Squire could no longer delay taking his departure. He found Juliana alone in the drawing-room; and when he had bade her a temporary farewell—only until the morrow—he inquired where Lord Harold was? She answered that she thought he had ascended to his own chamber.

"I will just seek him there, to shake him by the hand," observed the good-hearted Squire: "for as we are both to enter the family soon," he added with a smile, "we must maintain all friendly courtesies. Besides, under existing circumstances, it is but right I should acquaint him with what has taken place between you and me to-day—and also congratulate him on the change which his position is likewise to experience. One kiss more, dear Juliana—and I am off."

The kiss was given and returned; and Squire Hawkshaw, quitting the drawing-room, repaired to Lord Harold Staunton's chamber, which was on a higher storey and in a remote part of the building. On knocking at the door, he was desired to enter; and he found the young nobleman making some change in his toilet. He proceeded to mention his engagement with Juliana, and likewise to offer suitable congratulations on Harold's intended marriage with Lady Saxondale. It struck him for the moment that a somewhat strange expression passed over the exceedingly handsome countenance of Lord Harold,—an expression which seemed to spring from the writhing sense of internal pain: but as it immediately passed away, and Staunton recovered his wonted cheerfulness of look as he reciprocated those congratulations, the Squire thought no more of the circumstance: or if he did, he attributed it to the lingering effects of the severe fall from the horse.

"Why are you going so early to-day, Hawkshaw?" asked Lord Harold.

"I have some little business at Gainsborough," responded the Squire. "In fact, a large farmer, who owes me some money, has called a meeting of his creditors at a tavern there: and as he is a worthy good fellow, I am going to give him what help I can."

"You are going to ride across?" asked Harold.

"Yes: and on that same thorough-bred, too, that you were so venturesome with. I am afraid that you sometimes feel the pain now? And yet—let me see—it must be a good three weeks ago——"

"Ah! but it was a very serious fall," rejoined Harold. "I am going to have two or three hours' fishing, under the shade of those trees yonder, till dinner-time."

"You seem to be fond of manly sports," observed Hawkshaw. "Ah! you have got a pistol-case here:" —and the Squire, who possessed a perfect knowledge of every description of fire-arms, opened the box. "Double barrelled, eh?" he said, taking up the only one it contained; for the other was not there, although the case was formed to contain two. "This is a beautiful pistol—and an excellent maker's name too—one of the first in London."

"Yes: they are first-rate pistols," observed Staunton, turning aside to put on a shooting-jacket in which he was going on his fishing expedition.

"Where is the other pistol?" asked the Squire: "there ought to be a pair—it would be a great pity to lose one. Besides, one of these days you and I will have a shooting match. I will order my groom to bring over some pigeons from the Hall——But where is the other pistol?" he again asked.

"Oh! I left it behind in London," responded Staunton, now bending over a long wooden case which contained some fishing apparatus for which he had sent a few days previously from Gainsborough.

"Oh! no matter," said the Squire. "I have got a splendid collection of fire-arms; and when we do have our match, I will bring over a couple of rifles, which will be better than pistols. Are you a good shot, Staunton?——I mean with pistols."

"I—I—am considered to be so. But confound this fishing rod! there is something wrong with it."

"Let me see," said the Squire, hastening forward to render his assistance. "I know all about fishing-tackle; and if I had known you wanted it, could have lent you a better gear than that——But, good heavens! my dear fellow, what is the matter with you?"—for Lord Harold's countenance was as white as a sheet; and upon it was an expression of indescribable anguish, blended even with horror.

"Nothing, nothing—only those pains," was the quick and somewhat excited response.

"Ah!" rejoined the good-hearted Squire, "you must really take care of yourself, Staunton. You were perhaps more shaken than any of us fancied at the time. But let us look at this rod. There! —now it is all right; and I must be off—for it's past three o'clock. Do take care of yourself. Not too much exertion, mind!—for these sprains, and aches, and twinges do hang uncommonly about one."

With these words, Mr. Hawkshaw shook Lord Harold cordially by the hand, and then hurried from the chamber. Having threaded the long corridor towards the staircase, he rapidly descended the flight—reached the hall—and issuing forth, mounted his spirited steed, which was in readiness. Putting a crown-piece into the hand of the groom —for the Squire was generosity itself—he gallopped away, made the circuit of the grounds, and thus getting on the rear, or northern end of the castle, proceeded along the bank of the river through the fields in the direction of Gainsborough.

He had ridden about a couple of miles; and on reaching a gate, Mr. Hawkshaw was stooping forward to open it, when several horses, that were in the field which he was about to enter, gallopped, as if they were mad, but only in frolicsome sport, across the meadow. The thorough-bred which the Squire bestrode, instantaneously pricked up its ears, manifesting that sudden excitement which spirited horses are wont to do under such circumstances; and swerving abruptly on one side, the animal threw the Squire completely over the gate into the next field. His hat fell off—his head came in violent contact with a stone—and he was completely stunned. In a few minutes he came back to consciousness: and found an exceedingly prepossessing —indeed beautiful youth, bending over him—bathing his face with a wet handkerchief, which had been dipped for the purpose in the river that flowed close by.

"Are you much hurt?" inquired the youth, in a gentle voice, expressive of sincere sympathy and concern.

"No—I think not," said Mr. Hawkshaw: and then making an attempt to rise, he found that he was much better able to do so than might have been expected from the severity of his fall. "Thank God! there are no bones broken at all events. A little pain in the head—but that is of no great consequence. Tell me, my young friend, is there much of a contusion on the forehead?"

"No mark is apparent there at all," replied the youthful stranger: "but I felt a considerable swelling on the side—the hair however covers it."

"So much the better!" ejaculated the Squire, overjoyed at this intelligence. "Nobody need know anything of my misadventure. But where is the horse?"

"He made a long circuit, and then came back. There he is—just behind the hedge. I would have caught the noble animal, but did not like to leave you till I was assured that you were returning to consciousness."

"It would have been more seemly," exclaimed the Squire, "had I expressed my heartfelt thanks first to you, my young friend, before I inquired for my horse:"—and as he thus spoke, Mr. Hawkshaw took the youth's hand and shook it warmly. "Yes, I am indeed most grateful—you have evidently done me no small service. Why, one might have died if left to one's self in such a state—or been kicked to death by those half-wild horses there, that are scampering about—and which, by the bye, were the cause of the accident. But we must know more of each other," continued the Squire: and now that he surveyed the youth more attentively, he observed that he was poorly and indeed shabbily dressed, although his linen was scrupulously clean, and everything about him denoted as much neatness as the threadbare garments would allow their wearer to display.

"I thank you, sir, for your kindness," answered the youth: "but I am a stranger in these parts—my stay here will not be long——"

"Wait a moment!" cried Mr. Hawkshaw: and hastily opening the gate—for he felt but little inconvenience now from his accident—he fetched his horse from where it was browsing on the grass, and led the animal through the gate, which the youth civilly held open for the purpose.

"Now, my young friend," continued Mr. Hawkshaw: "I repeat that we cannot part in this manner. In the first place, let me announce myself. Here is my card: my residence is a few miles distant in that direction. How long are you staying in these parts? where are you at present residing? and will you shift your quarters to the Hall? You shall be as welcome there as if we had known each other for as many years as we have minutes."

"Again do I thank you most sincerely for your kindness," responded the youth: "but I cannot avail myself of it. It were however churlish and rude not to say that on some future occasion, should I revisit Lincolnshire, I shall assuredly do myself the pleasure of calling at Hawkshaw Hall."

"Well, I take *that* as a promise," exclaimed the kind hearted hospitable Squire. "But remember —it must be as faithfully kept as my invitation is sincerely given. And now tell me whose acquaintance it is I have had the pleasure of forming?"

"I have no card with me," replied the youth, "but my name is Paton."

"Then let me henceforth call young Mr. Paton my friend," said Hawkshaw, again grasping Frank's hand. "But come now—don't think me rude—and don't be angry with me for what I am going to say. Is there nothing I can do for you? I have told you that I mean to regard you as a friend; and you must look upon me in the same light. You are very young—and I dare say that you have been brought up in a manner above your present means. Now, don't be offended—for I do not seek to wound your feelings: no, not for the world! Perhaps if you had a good friend—a sincere friend—a friend who would take you by the hand—a friend, in short, who would not let you want for a few hundred pounds to give you a fair start in life——"

Frank's countenance had become the colour of crimson: for he knew that all this was said in consequence of the shabby apparel which he wore. But at the same time he experienced a deep sense of gratitude towards his new friend, whose frank generosity of disposition it was by no means difficult to penetrate.

"To cut all this short," said Mr. Hawkshaw, "will you come and take up your quarters with me at the Hall? It is not very far distant; and if you go to Gainsborough, there is a van leaving at six o'clock that will put you down at the park-gate. Are you staying at Gainsborough?"

"Yes—I am staying there for the present," replied Frank, who did not like to say too much concerning himself; because his business in Lincolnshire was, as the reader may suspect, of rather a secret as well as of a delicate nature.

"And may I ask," pursued Hawkshaw, "whether you are rambling here with any fixed purpose, or only through curiosity? Perhaps you were on your way to see that fine old castle yonder? I have just come from thence: it is Lady Saxondale's."

"Yes," observed Frank, with difficulty veiling his confusion at all the various associations conjured up by the mention of that name: "I was going to while away a few hours by looking at the castle. As for your invitation to stay at the Hall, I again express my sincere thanks; and with regard to all the other kind things you said, and the offers you so generously but delicately made——"

"You refuse them?" said Mr. Hawkshaw: and he gazed upon the youth with a growing interest as well as curiosity. "Are you alone at Gainsborough? have you parents, relatives, or friends there?"

"No: I came upon a little business of a private nature, which perhaps will not detain me beyond to-morrow. And now, sir, with your permission I shall continue my way and bid you farewell."

"And you will suffer me to do nothing for you?"

asked Hawkshaw. "I see that you are a young gentleman in speech—in manners - in everything ——But will you be offended if I ask you for your address in Gainsborough, that I may leave there some little token of my gratitude for the service you have rendered me?"

"Again and again do I express my gratitude," responded Frank, "coupled with the assurance that I require nothing. On some future occasion we shall perhaps meet again. And now farewell, sir."

With these words Frank hurried away in the direction of Saxondale Castle, while Mr. Hawkshaw proceeded to mount his horse, saying to himself, "He is a nice youth—a very interesting youth—but somehow or another I can't make him out. I should like to know more of him:"—and he was half inclined to ride back and renew the conversation; but fearing that his good intentions might be interpreted as mere inquisitiveness, or even construed into downright impertinent curiosity, he galloped away towards Gainsborough.

Meanwhile Francis Paton had hurried onward until the sounds of the retreating horse's hoofs no longer reached his ears; and then slackening his pace somewhat, he thought to himself, "This Mr. Hawkshaw is evidently a warm-hearted and excellent man. Had I wanted a friend, accident would have sent me one in him."

But his thoughts were speedily diverted into another channel: for as the reader may full well suppose, it was not to survey the fine old castle that Francis Paton had come down into Lincolnshire—but to obtain an interview with the daughter of its mistress. Trusting to circumstances to furnish him with the desired opportunity, he approached nearer to the grounds; and skirting the park-railing, plunged his looks into the enclosure of the spacious garden within. On reaching a gate, and finding it unlocked, he thought there would at least be no harm in entering the park; and once there, he naturally enough approached the garden all the more readily and likewise the more anxiously because he beheld a form in white drapery moving in the midst of a shady avenue near the extremity. Nearer and nearer he drew—but cautiously, in case it should not be the object of his search, although his heart told him that it was—until at length he was nigh enough to clear up all doubt. Yes: it *was* she—Juliana Farefield—the idol of his youthful heart—the dearly-beloved image that his soul cherished!—it was she, robed in the same white drapery which she had worn in the forenoon, when walking in that very same spot with George Hawkshaw!

CHAPTER XCVII.

THE TEST OF LOVE.

THE moment that Frank Paton became convinced the form he beheld was that of Juliana — the moment he caught sight of her splendid countenance framed by those massive bands of glossy raven hair—he shrank into the shade of the densest shrub just within the railings, on the outer side of which he stood, so that it screened him from her view. How should he be received? had she forgotten him? or, at least, had she ceased to love him? Would she resent his appearing before her? would she feel annoyed and indignant on beholding him in that mean, shabby attire?

Such were the misgivings which swept hurriedly through the mind of Francis Paton, and kept him transfixed with suspense and apprehension for upwards of a minute. But no, no—it was impossible! she could not have forgotten him! she could not have ceased to love him! she would not discard him because he came in poor apparel! And if she did——why, then the test would be accomplished; and it were better that he should learn his fate than linger on, entertaining hopes which after all would be never destined to receive fulfilment. Now was the moment to breathe her name!—she was passing near the shrub—she was barely four yards from the spot where he was concealed!

"Miss Farefield—Juliana," murmured Frank: and he held his breath with renewed suspense.

"Who calls?" she ejaculated with a sudden start: then stopping short, she swept her bright looks around. "That voice—Oh, that voice——"

A thrill of joy shot through the youthful heart of the lady's devoted lover: for in those accents there seemed to be wafted the assurance of continued affection, of delight, and of hope. He sprang forward—a cry of joy burst from Juliana's lips: he leapt over the low palings of the garden—he would have thrown himself at her feet—but she caught him in her arms.

"Dearest, dearest Frank," she murmured, pressing him again and again to her bosom, and covering his cheeks, his lips, and his forehead with the most impassioned kisses. "Dearest, dearest Frank, is it indeed you?"—and more fervidly still did she embrace him—more glowing and rapturous were the caresses she lavished upon him.

"Beloved Juliana——Oh, my beloved one!"—and he could say no more: his voice was choked with unutterable emotions of bliss, and joy, and ecstacy: and if he had leisure for a single thought apart from those feelings, it was in self-reproach that he had for an instant doubted her constancy or suspected her love.

"My own dear Frank—my heart's dearest Frank," she said, drawing herself the least thing back, but still keeping her arms thrown round his lithe and slender form: "let me look at you—let me gaze upon your beautiful face—let me look into the depths of those handsome eyes!"—and as she thus spoke, with the rich blood mantling upon her own hot cheeks, her regards, half tender, half devouring, wandered from feature to feature of that youthful countenance which was indeed of the most exquisite beauty.

"Then you do love me, Juliana?" murmured Frank, with a sweet smile that revealed the brilliancy of his ivory teeth: but he was allowed to say no more at that instant—for his lips were sealed by those of the impassioned lady, who again and again pressed him to her bosom.

"Love you, Frank?" she said, in a deep earnest voice: "love you? Oh, yes—I love you beyond the power of language to describe. You know that I love you! Did not your heart tell you so? or else why did you seek me again? Yes, beautiful and adorable boy—I love you—by this kiss I love you! And by this—and this—and this!"

"Oh, my own Juliana," murmured Frank; "a

thousand anxieties are now cleared up—a thousand cruel fears dispelled!"

"Ah, wicked boy!" responded the lady, now slightly relaxing the embrace in which she held him and looking with a sweet deprecating archness upon his countenance: "did you, then, think I had forgotten you? Why have you not sought me before? But come—we have much to say to each other: there is a shady arbour at the end of this avenue—we will proceed thither and converse. There is no fear of interruption. Come, dearest Frank, come!"—and she gaily and blithely led the youth along.

They reached the bower formed by thickly twining jasmine intermingled with roses, the flowers of which were in full bloom, and the whole supported by an over-arching trellis-work. Into this bower—one fully fitted for the sighs, and the kisses, and the language of love—Juliana Farefield conducted Frank; and they sat down side by side. She retained one of his hands between both her own; and then she looked at him—long and earnestly at first—it was with fondest adoration, this gaze of her's, fixed upon his glowing countenance—for the natural paleness of his cheeks was covered now by the mantling blood; and then it was with a growing expression of regret and sorrow on her part, as she surveyed the meanness and poverty of his apparel.

"Dearest Frank," she said, "you are not happy—you are not prosperous in your circumstances. I fear me that the world goes not well with you?"

"Alas, no!" responded the youth: and deeper grew the colour upon his cheeks—and he became covered with confusion; for he was now suddenly seized with an intense dislike for the part that he was enacting: he thought that he had already received sufficient evidences of Juliana's constant and devoted love to render a test unnecessary; and he was about to throw himself at her feet and reveal the motive for which he had come in that mean garb—when the thought suddenly flashed to his recollection that he had solemnly and sacredly promised his father, ere quitting London, that he *would* put her to that test, and that in no moment of weakness or infatuation would he abandon it ere ascertaining the full result.

"You were going to say something, Frank—you stopped short suddenly," said Juliana, contemplating him with renewed, or rather with redoubled attention. "I see but too plainly, my dearest boy, that things are not well with you: but, thank heaven! it is in my power to remedy them. Frank," she continued, in a half-reproachful, half-tender tone, "if you wanted for anything, why did you not write to me? You know that I am not without money; and even if I were, every jewel that I possess should have been placed at your service. Good God! my darling Frank, to think that you may have been in distress—to think that you could have lacked perhaps the necessaries of life——Oh, the thought is more than I can endure!"

Again did she seize him in her arms—again did she press him with almost convulsive violence to her highly swelling bosom—and again, too, did she lavish upon him the warmest, most impassioned caresses. Then she released him from her arms; and as if he were indeed the bright and beautiful idol of her adoration, she sat gazing upon him with a voluptuous tenderness. Again was his purpose shaken: again did he feel more than half-inclined to avow his object in presenting himself before her in an almost pauper raiment;—and there was a moment, too, when his heart swelled with a sense of the proudest feeling that he might, if he chose, proclaim himself to be rich—that he had found a father and a mother—and that they had promised to endow him with a fortune in case he should find Juliana all he hoped and wished, and should in due time lead her to the altar. But the very thought that he was in a condition to proclaim this triumphant intelligence, had the effect of reminding him of the solemn sacred vow which he had pledged to his parents that the test should be persevered in until the very end.

"Now tell me, dearest Frank," said Juliana, perceiving that he remained silent,—perceiving also that conflicting thoughts were agitating in his mind, but of what nature she could not guess: "tell me, my own dear Frank, what you have been doing with yourself? what has happened to you since we parted? It is nearly six weeks——Oh! it seems an age. But, thank God! it has only been for so short an interval—because whatsoever you may have suffered, has not therefore been of long continuance. Ah! did you think that because on that day when you were driven by my wicked mother from Saxondale House,—did you think that my lips would echo whatsoever taunts had flowed from her's? Did you think, my own dear Frank, that I could be so cruel or unjust as to visit upon you whatsoever deeds your sister might have done? No, no: you should have known me better—you should have known me better! But, thank heaven! you are come back to me at last!"

"Yes, dear Juliana—I have come back to you with only one hope in my heart:"—and Frank gazed most adoringly, most enthusiastically upon the splendid countenance of the patrician lady.

"And that hope, Frank?" she murmured. "Ah! you need not tell me what it is, I can understand it full well: because I likewise have cherished such a hope,—the hope that our loves might be renewed!"

"But let me explain this hope of mine, dear Juliana," continued the youth, now remembering the entire lesson which the Marquis of Eagledean had given him ere he left Stamford Manor. "You love me, Juliana—I know you do: the past has proved it—the present confirms it. But love has likewise a future, as well as a past and a present; and it is of this that I would speak to you!"

"Proceed, my dearest Frank," murmured Juliana, suffering her head to droop upon his shoulder, so that his cheek rested against her polished brow, and the long curls of his hair fell upon her own massive bands. "The music of your voice sinks deliciously into my heart. Proceed, dear Frank—I love to listen to you."

"Well then, my own Juliana," he continued, entertaining not the slightest doubt as to the result of the test to which he was upon the point of putting her, and longing to hurry it over that he might give her the assurance that it was nothing *but* a test, to be crowned by joyous revealings on his part relative to his own position,—"since you will listen thus patiently, I will speak. I said

that love has a future. What is to be the future of our love? I come to you, poor—unhappy—an obscure and unknown youth: my apparel denotes my condition—you yourself have already penetrated it—and you have given me your sympathy. Nay, more—you have assured me, in words as delicate as they were kind, that if I have suffered privations, it was my own fault for not applying to you—and that if I am still suffering under the cruel circumstances of the world, you will endeavour to amend them. For all this, dearest Juliana, accept my heartfelt, devoted thanks. No words are capable of expressing my gratitude!"

"Not gratitude, Frank," murmured Juliana, in accents laden with a sensuous languor: "but speak to me of love."

"It is of love, dearest, that I am about to speak," he continued. "I have said, therefore, enough to convince you of my position. You behold it—you have understood it. But poor as I am in purse, my heart is rich in boundless, illimitable love for you. There are two alternatives between which I have to choose. An opportunity presents itself for me to seek my fortune in a far-off land. That is one alternative. The other is, that if you will bestow your hand on me, you will raise me to your own rank in life, and I may have a chance of obtaining a livelihood in my native country. Those are the alternatives, dearest Juliana: my decision depends upon the next words that issue from your lips."

If the Hon. Miss Farefield did not start—did not even raise her head from the youth's shoulder, when he thus undisguisedly, frankly, and even boldly demanded her hand in marriage,—it was because she was seized with a perfect stupor of astonishment. But he himself noticed not the effect which his words thus produced upon her, inasmuch as he could not behold her countenance: his cheek rested upon her temple. And she *was* astounded! As the reader is well aware, she had regarded Frank only as the object of a passion that devoured her—only as the means of assuaging the fires that were consuming her—only as a being whom she could cherish as the idol of a secret and illicit amour. But to become his wife—to sacrifice herself to one who had been a lacquey—to wed the poverty in which he seemed to be steeped—to descend from the pedestal of her patrician rank, and become the object of scorn and contempt on the part of all who knew her—to abandon likewise the brilliant prospect of becoming mistress of Hawkshaw Hall, with a husband whose generous confidence she felt assured of being able to abuse in all circumstances where her own particular pleasures and fancies might be concerned,—to consummate, in a word, all these tremendous sacrifices——no, Juliana Farefield was utterly unprepared for such a result! She was astounded therefore at a demand, which, notwithstanding the fervid passion she experienced for Frank, she could not help regarding as a monstrous audacity on his part. Ah! it would have been very different indeed if he had revealed to her the whole truth—that he had found a father in the rich Marquis of Eagledean—that in due course he was to be publicly acknowledged as that great nobleman's son—and that his sire would give him a a fortune, which, if not so large as Mr. Hawkshaw's, would nevertheless be an ample one;—very different, we say, would it have been, if Juliana had heard all these things from Frank's lips! *Then* she would have followed only the dictates of that powerful passion which she believed to be love—*then* she would at once have clasped that charming youth in her arms, murmuring an enthusiastic "Yes:" and throwing a veil over what he might have been in times past, she would have been proud, when she thought of him as her husband, for the present and the future. But as she knew nothing of all those things which young Paton might have revealed to her, had he chosen, she was at once struck with the seeming audacity and presumption of his demand; and not for a moment did she think of making what appeared to be so stupendous a sacrifice. Nevertheless, she could not endure the thought of losing him altogether; and she asked herself wherefore her original plans could not be carried out—that she should wed Mr. Hawkshaw and that Frank should continue her paramour?

For upwards of a minute did she remain motionless, half reclining in his arms, with her head resting upon his shoulder: then she slowly raised her countenance—and assuming her most winning, most seductive look, she said, "Listen to me, Frank."

"Proceed, dearest," he responded: for there was nothing in her mien or her manner to throw a damp upon his hopes.

"Listen, my dearest boy," she continued; "and I will tell you what I think, and what I propose after all you have said. As for the alternative of your fleeing from your native land to seek your fortune in other climes, it is cruel of you to hint at such a thing; and you must know perfectly well that I could not endure the thought. Then, as to the other alternative, we must look at it calmly and deliberately. Of what use would it be, Frank, for us to wed in order to be poor? I have no fortune; and I could neither endure poverty myself, nor behold you suffer it. You know that I love you devotedly—passionately; and you love me in return. We must make the best of circumstances; and they perhaps are not so unfavourable as you may apprehend. Now listen, dear Frank—and let me not see a shade gathering upon that beautiful countenance of your's: it must always brighten up with smiles to beam upon me, as mine shall ever beam smilingly upon you. Dear Frank, I have received an offer of marriage——"

"Ah!"—and the youth gave a quick spasmodic start, while the colour which had been slowly fading away from his countenance during the latter portion of Juliana's speech, suddenly vanished altogether.

"Why do you start thus? why do you turn pale?" she said, pressing his hand to her bosom, and at the same time looking with impassioned earnestness into his countenance. "Hear me to the end. I have received, as I was saying, an offer of marriage. In a worldly point of view, it is an advantageous one—though I need hardly assure you there is no affection on my side: for all the love that my heart had to bestow is your's—and your's only. Well, but this marriage will give me a social position, and will also give me wealth; and you, my dearest Frank, shall continue to be the real object of

my love—you shall have no care for your livelihood—no need to push your fortune in other realms——"

"And would you, Juliana," interrupted Frank, in a voice that was not merely low, but likewise hollow and gloomy—sad, and even startling to hear from the lips of one so young,—"and would *you*, Juliana, be guilty of such tremendous deceit towards a husband, and doom *me* to the degradation of being a hireling favourite—a pensioned paramour?"

"Dear Frank, how strangely you talk! One would really think," continued Juliana, "that you were affecting to speak like a Puritan:"—and she gazed upon him searchingly, to see if he could possibly be in earnest.

"O Juliana," he exclaimed, with a sudden outburst of emotion: "do not, do not let me think that it is you who have been speaking in a manner sufficient to astonish and bewilder me!—do not destroy the brightest dream that ever shed its golden influence upon the human heart! Recall everything you have said—tell me that you were seeking to put *me* to the test—that you were compelling me to pass through an ordeal for the purpose of assuring yourself that I am worthy to become your husband!"

"Frank, dear Frank, I am at a loss to comprehend you:"—and Juliana would have been really and truly angry, had not the youth seemed so eminently handsome at the moment, with the expression of lofty pride upon his brow, and of an earnest entreaty on his eyes and his lips, that she could not bear to reproach him.

"Look me in the face, Juliana," he said, his voice again becoming sad and mournful: "look me in the face—not as you are doing now, with all the blandishments of your beauty: but look at me seriously and steadily, and tell me deliberately and frankly whether you ere now expressed your precise meaning, and whether you still adhere to it—that you are to marry another, but that you will continue to regard me as——as——I cannot speak the word again! And yet pause, Juliana, before you answer me. Remember that your love has been given to me, and that we are already the same as husband and wife in the sight of heaven. Can you in honour—can you in delicacy—can you in decency, accompany another to the altar? can you so far deceive the confiding heart of some fond and no doubt good and honourable man, by suffering him to suppose that it is a virgin bride whom he is to receive to his arms?"

"Frank," responded the Hon. Miss Farefield, the flush of mingled indignation, shame, and humiliation rising to her countenance—for she was now truly indignant, and unable to conceal this anger of her's: "you are abusing the position to which my love has raised you in respect to myself. It ill becomes *you*, Frank, to make my weakness a subject of reproach: and did I love you less, I should be more offended still at this lecture which you are taking upon yourself to read me. Come, my dear boy—let me hear no more of such speeches from your lips. Have I not offered to do all that woman can for you? I must ensure my own position: and our happiness may remain uninterrupted. Dear Frank, tell me that you are satisfied with what I have proposed; and I will no longer be angry with you for the manner in which you addressed me. And now, do not be offended, my dear boy: but take whatsoever I have about me at this moment——here is gold ——"

Thus speaking, Juliana drew forth her purse: but with a sudden cry of indignation and aversion—of wounded pride and bitter disappointment—Francis Paton sprang up from the seat in the arbour, dashed the purse from her hand, and bending upon the astounded and even affrighted lady a look so strange, so wild, and so full of ineffable feelings, that it was never afterwards effaced from her memory, he cried, "No—everything is at an end between us! I have put you to a test, and I have discovered your real character. Thank God that I have done so! The veil of infatuation has fallen from my eyes. Beautiful serpent that you are, there is guile on your lips—poison throughout your entire being! Farewell—farewell, for ever!"

With these words he turned and fled precipitately.

"Frank, dearest Frank!" exclaimed Juliana, speeding after him: "come back to me—come back to me, I conjure you!"

But he heeded her not: the paling was reached—he sprang over it quickly: he flew across the park—and in a few minutes was out of sight.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

HAWKSHAW HALL.

As if flying away from a spot where the spells of a worse than Circean enchantment were to be avoided, Francis Paton sped across the fields, reckless of the course he was taking, and having no thought for anything but the magnitude of that disappointment which had succeeded the bright hopes so recently entertained. Indeed, he hurried onward as if for the purpose of outstripping that very thought,—a thought which kept pace with him—haunting him—circling him round about—appearing here, there, and everywhere—racking his brain, torturing his soul, sending pangs through his heart—making him feel as if the earth had nothing that he now need live for. In this manner the unhappy youth sped along through the fields for more than half-an-hour—until at length, wearied and exhausted, he threw himself upon a bank beneath a verdant hedge; and covering his face with his hands, burst into tears.

This outpouring of his sorrow proved a relief, and by degrees he found himself enabled to reflect with comparative calmness upon everything that had just occurred. But for the first few moments he could scarcely bring himself to believe that it was all a reality: it appeared like a dream. Was it possible that Juliana had never loved him as he could only wish to be loved?—was it possible that he had merely served her sensual phantasy, and that he had been regarded as one who would accept the lot of a profligate lady's paramour? Oh, that he should have been insulted by such a degradation!—oh, that he should have been subjected to such a humiliation! To have been a liveried lacquey in her mother's service, was mortifying enough, now that his circumstances were so altered: but to be deemed so lost to all honourable principle as to be proffered a position which was infamy itself, was enough to make his heart feel as if fiery scorpions were writhing around it. And then, too, to have

seen the mask so completely torn away from the countenance of her whom he had so fondly loved—to be compelled to look upon her henceforth as a snake wearing a beautiful skin—to have the conviction so rudely forced upon him that she was a lump of moral rottenness—corruption throughout from head to foot—steeped to the very lips in depravity——Oh, all this was sufficient to make him mistrust the whole world in future—almost sufficient to induce him to escape from it as from a morass swarming with reptiles!

Ah! these were stern and severe truths indeed for Francis Paton to admit into his soul: but nevertheless they *were* truths, and not to be rejected. But the longer he sat meditating on that verdant bank where he had thrown himself, the more did he see reason to appreciate the wisdom and the foresight of his father, the Marquis of Eagledean, who had so earnestly conjured him to put Juliana Farefield to the severest test. Ah! and he, in his infatuation—in his blind besotted confidence—in his fervid and enthusiastic trustfulness, would at one moment have abjured that test as an insult to her love—an outrage to the evidences of affection which she was lavishing upon him. Love! it was a mockery!——no: it was the baseness of a depraved passion. Evidences of affection!—no: they were the blandishments and the allurements in which the feelings of the profligate woman expressed themselves.

Francis Paton remained for more than half-an-hour seated upon that bank, giving way to his reflections. Suddenly, he looked at his watch, the chain of which he had been hitherto careful not to display, as the appearance of jewellery would but have ill-assorted with the studied penury of his garb. He looked at his watch, we say—and he found that it was six o'clock. The evening was delicious: but he had no power to appreciate the beauties of nature in the present condition of his mind. It was true that he had grown calmer through that half-hour's reflection; but still he was very far from being completely tranquillised. He was unhappy—restless—uneasy.

Rising from the bank, he wandered on again in a listless mood—not perceiving which direction he was taking, nor caring whither he went. On, on he walked at a quick pace: for the excitement of his mind was still sufficiently strong to make him proceed thus hurriedly: but it never once occurred to him to cast a glance around and assure himself whether he were proceeding towards Gainsborough or not. In this strange condition of mind, the youth continued his way through the fields. Another hour had passed: again he looked at his watch—it was seven o'clock. Yet, it was only in a sort of mechanical manner that he thus thought of the time, when he did not think of the path that he was pursuing: but presently the thought suddenly flashed across his memory, that he was thus wandering aimlessly and without purpose. He now stopped short and looked all around. Saxondale Castle was no longer to be seen: nor was he near any town that might be Gainsborough. He was in the wide open country, with here and there a few isolated cottages dotting the beautiful landscape. He began to compute that he must have walked some six or seven miles since parting from Juliana. He felt weary and faint, alike from fatigue and want of food: but he had no appetite—he craved nothing—he was sick at heart. He must however get back to Gainsborough as soon as possible: for his valet Edward, who had accompanied him into Lincolnshire, would be uneasy at his protracted absence. Bending his steps towards the nearest cottage, which was still at least half a mile distant, Francis Paton thus reasoned with himself:—

"Instead of giving way to sorrowful feelings, I ought to thank heaven for having followed my excellent father's advice and put Juliana to this test. Perhaps if I had at once told her that I had found parents who were enabled to give me a fortune, she would have consented to marry me: and, Oh! what an alliance would it have proved! Better, better far to place a viper in my bosom! Could I have expected that as a wife she would remain faithful to me? Ah! I should have believed it—I should have put confidence in her—my soul would have given her all its most loving trust—and some day, sooner or later, I should have been startled from my dream—I should have awakened to find myself deceived! Oh, it is a fortunate escape, and one that should fill my heart with gratitude instead of with useless repinings! But yet—but yet, it is hard to have had the golden bowl of hope thus rudely dashed from my lips to be broken at my feet: and it is difficult to banish that bright and beautiful image—*too* bright and *too* beautiful—from my mind!"

While thus meditating, the youth reached the cottage, which stood in a narrow lane intersecting a wide expanse of verdant meadows. A peasant couple, evidently husband and wife, with three or four little children, were sitting at their evening meal. Frank asked for a cup of milk: it was immediately supplied him; and not choosing to remunerate the woman in a direct manner for her hospitality, he put some silver into the eldest child's hand, bidding him "purchase a toy with it the next time his father took him to Gainsborough." He then inquired how far he was from that town?—he was told eight miles. How far was he from Saxondale Castle? for he wished to ascertain what distance he had walked since parting from Juliana:—he was told seven miles. Could he obtain any conveyance in the neighbourhood to take him to Gainsborough, for he had lost his way and was much wearied? But at the very moment that he had put this last question—and before it was answered—a gentleman on horseback rode up to the front of the cottage.

"Here's the Squire!" exclaimed the peasant, rushing out to see what Mr. Hawkshaw wanted.

It was a glass of ale or cider, whichever might happen to be in the place: for Mr. Hawkshaw was thirsty. Frank's first impulse was to stand aside from the vicinage of the open door, so as to avoid being seen by the Squire: for he did not wish to undergo the process of another interrogatory at that gentleman's hands—nor to have the pain of declining a renewed invitation which might possibly be put in respect to a visit to the Hall. But Mr. Hawkshaw had caught sight of him; and in a hurried whisper he asked the peasant whether a youth of such-and-such a description was not in the cottage? On receiving a reply in the affirmative, together with an account of the various inquiries Frank had been making, the good-hearted

Squire sprang from his horse—rushed into the cottage—and seizing the youth by the hand, exclaimed, "Now that you are on my territory, I take you prisoner. You have lost your way—you have been wandering about—you want a conveyance to take you back to Gainsborough—and you shall have one from the Hall: but only on condition that you come and dine with me first. My house is barely two miles distant; and if you are too much fatigued to go so far, I will scamper home and send down a gig to fetch you. Come, give your assent at once: for I shall take no refusal."

"Indeed, Mr. Hawkshaw," responded Frank, "I know not how to decline your courtesy without seeming positively rude and churlish. But the fact is, my servant is at Gainsborough: he will be very uneasy——"

"Your servant?"—and the Squire could not avoid the ejaculation: for it certainly struck him as most singular that this shabbily dressed youth, of poverty-stricken appearance, should be attended by a valet. "Well," Hawkshaw immediately continued, fearful that he himself had been guilty of a rudeness, "the moment we get to the Hall, one of my men shall take a chaise-cart across to Gainsborough and fetch your servant."

At this moment the sounds of a vehicle coming along the lane were heard; and a gig, in which a stout jolly-looking man was seated, came in sight.

"This is most opportune!" ejaculated Hawkshaw, looking through the cottage-window. "Here's Farmer Sladden—a capital tenant of mine, by the bye—and he will drive you on to the Hall. It won't be a quarter of a mile out of his way."

Frank could no longer refuse. He was too tired to think of walking any farther; and he had moreover conceived a friendship for the kind, frank-hearted Hawkshaw. He was likewise dispirited enough to feel that the companionship of such a host would be far from disagreeable; and he therefore accepted the proposed arrangement, with due acknowledgments of gratitude.

"You have nothing to thank me for, my young friend," said the Squire. "I owe you a great obligation:"—then rushing forth from the cottage, he beckoned Farmer Sladden to stop.

The gig drew up accordingly. Frank entered it: Mr. Hawkshaw requested Mr. Sladden to drive the young gentleman as far as the Hall; and remounting his horse, which the peasant had meanwhile been holding, he rode on a little in advance. In a short time a large and imposing-looking mansion, in the Elizabethan style of architecture, gradually stood forth from amidst the stately trees of an immense park; and Farmer Sladden informed his young companion that it was the Hall. He added that far as the eye could sweep all around, did Mr. Hawkshaw's domain extend. In a few minutes the porter's lodge at the entrance of the park was reached—the gates flew open—and the gig followed Mr. Hawkshaw up a gradual ascent of gravel road to the entrance of the Hall. There Frank alighted, thanking Mr. Sladden for his courtesy; and the worthy farmer drove away.

"Now, my young friend," said the Squire, when he had conducted his guest into a spacious, lofty, and handsomely furnished apartment; "tell me at once where your servant is to be found in Gainsborough; and one of my grooms shall go over and fetch him without delay. We will then have dinner: for I dare say you are hungry—and my appetite is marvellously keen. I am uncommon glad I was detained so long at Gainsborough, since it has afforded me this unexpected pleasure of meeting a second time with you."

Frank mentioned the hotel at Gainsborough where the servant would be found: and pulling out a well-filled purse, he begged that Mr. Hawkshaw's groom would become the bearer of the requisite funds to settle the account at that hostelry. While in the gig, Frank had fastened his handsome watch-chain in the usual manner to one of the button-holes of his waistcoat; and the sight of this appendage, together with the production of the amply furnished purse, made the Squire wonder more and more what possible mystery there could be about his new friend, and why with such adequate means his apparel should be so wretchedly mean and shabby. The youth was however still too much abstracted to reflect that these circumstances must indeed appear strange to his host; and therefore he thought not of volunteering any explanation. Of course the Squire spoke not a word calculated to show that he sought one.

The groom was despatched to Gainsborough; and immediately afterwards dinner was served up. The repast was alike substantial and excellent: there were no other guests; but until the dessert was placed on the table, a couple of footmen, in handsome though somewhat old-fashioned liveries, remained in attendance. The discourse, therefore, which passed between Mr. Hawkshaw and young Paton, was only upon indifferent and every-day subjects. But when the cloth was removed, and the board was covered with fruits and wines, the domestics withdrew; and then Frank, who in the meanwhile had found leisure for reflection as to the singularity of his position, thought that it was time to give a few words of explanation.

"Mr. Hawkshaw," he said, "in the first place I must renew my thanks for this generous hospitality on your part——"

"Not a syllable, Mr. Paton!" interrupted the Squire. "I have already told you that I consider myself *your* debtor. Thank heaven, the hurt I received has proved much more trivial than might have at first been anticipated."

"I am rejoiced to receive this assurance," answered Frank. "But I was on the point of observing that you must doubtless consider it strange to have beheld me wandering about in such a manner; and also," he added with a mournful look, "that I should be so poorly apparelled, although possessed of the amplest means."

"I don't seek to penetrate into your affairs, my young friend," observed the Squire; "and if you consider it necessary to give me proofs of your respectability, I can tell you at once I don't want them. Your speech—your air—your manners, are those of a young gentleman: but even if you were not, it would be all the same—for I am not merely under an obligation to you, but I have likewise conceived a great interest on your behalf."

"For this reason, therefore, Mr. Hawkshaw," responded Frank, "and in return for that generous assurance, I consider it my duty to tell you something respecting myself. Nay, permit me to do so. There is perhaps some little romance in the tale

that I am about to narrate; and at all events it will serve for conversation as well as any other topic."

"If you regard the matter in this point of view," observed Hawkshaw, "you shall have your own way. Now, fill your glass—and let us enjoy ourselves. I am sorry to see that your spirits are none of the best: but I must hope to contribute towards cheering them somewhat. I dare be sworn it is some love-matter: but pray do not for a moment fancy that I seek to make light of it—as I myself must plead guilty to having recently surrendered up my heart to the keeping of the most beautiful and virtuous of her sex."

Frank heaved a profound sigh: for he could not help envying Mr. Hawkshaw the mingled confidence, satisfaction, and pride with which he was enabled—or at least thought himself enabled—to speak of the object of his affection.

"Yes," said the youth, "you have discovered the true key to the reading of my unhappiness. I have loved where I ought not to have loved. But permit me to give you some few words of explanation. And first of all, start not when I tell you that but very recently I was in a menial capacity, though having been well educated and properly brought up. However, such was the case. I *was* a menial, wearing the badge of servitude—an obscure and humble individual—more than half suspecting that my parentage was good, and yet without any certainty upon the subject. Indeed, I had not the remotest idea who my father might be—though, as I have already hinted, I had some reason to imagine my mother was a lady of rank. Well, Mr. Hawkshaw, it was my good fortune—as I thought at the time—but my misfortune as I now discover it to be—to become the object of what I took to be *love* on the part of a young lady of marvellous beauty. I will not mention her name: I will not even give you the slightest idea of her portraiture. God forbid that, having loved her as I have done, I should do her an injury by proclaiming her secret! Suffice it to say that I saw she loved me. I loved her in return. Yes: ardently—fondly—adoringly did I love her! She was to me the object of a worship: her image sat enshrined in my heart like an idol in a temple. I would have laid down my life for her: there was no sacrifice possible to make that I was not prepared to make if called upon, and if such sacrifice on the part of so humble an individual as I was *then*, would have benefited her. Methought that she loved me as fondly and as well. Mr. Hawkshaw, inasmuch as I have not mentioned her name—as I shall not mention it—and as not a syllable will pass my lips to furnish an idea of her identity, should you ever meet her in the world—there can be no harm in confessing that she gave me the utmost proof which woman could give of her attachment."

Francis Paton stopped short: he wished he could have recalled the statement he had just made: he was fearful he had gone too far. It now struck him that Mr. Hawkshaw had casually mentioned, a few hours back, at the time of the accident, that he had just come from Saxondale Castle. He therefore knew Juliana: possibly he might some day learn that he (Francis Paton) had been in Lady Saxondale's service—and should this fact come to his knowledge, he might put two and two together, and thence arrive at the conclusion that Juliana herself was the heroine of the present narrative. Such was the transient fear which shot through the youth's brain. But it was only transient: for on a second thought, he saw that it would be very difficult indeed for Mr. Hawkshaw to imbibe any such suspicion or frame any such conclusion. Frank had been speaking vaguely: he had not said that it was a lady in the same house where he was a menial, who had formed an attachment for him. But would it not appear strange that he should this day have been seen in the vicinage of Saxondale Castle? might not *this* circumstance lead Mr. Hawkshaw to suspect something? Again did Frank see the perilous ground on which he had been treading, and the danger there was of seriously compromising Miss Farefield—which he was far too generous-hearted and too magnanimous to do. He therefore at once saw the necessity of deviating somewhat from the truth of his narrative, and making it appear that the lady of whom he was speaking, resided in quite a different neighbourhood from that in which he had first encountered Mr. Hawkshaw.

Such was the train of reflections which swept rapidly through the youth's brain; and though it has required a long space to record them, yet in reality they occupied but a few moments. Mr. Hawkshaw, perceiving that he paused and reflected, attributed this to the peculiar mood of his mind at the instant.

"Yes," continued Frank, "this lady of whom I am speaking, gave me the utmost proof of love: and methought that it was a real love, the sincerest and the fondest. Then came a whirl of circumstances, hurrying me on to the solution of the strangest destiny. I suddenly quitted the family where I was in service—I was separated from the object of my adoration—the mystery of my parentage was cleared up—I found that my preconceived suspicions were correct—my mother was a lady of quality—and more than this, I discovered that my father was a man of exalted rank. My fortunes changed all in a moment. After years of separation, my father and mother were brought together again. They are now married. You understand, Mr. Hawkshaw, from what I have told you—that I was not born in wedlock: nevertheless, I was the offspring of the tenderest and most faithful love. My parents are immensely rich: my father will give me a fortune whensoever I am prepared to settle in life. A few days back he learnt the history of my love for this lady of whom I am speaking. How did he act?—not sternly and implacably, as many fathers would—but generously, kindly, and considerately. He said, 'Go to where the object of your affection is at present to be found; appear before her in the meanest and poorest costume; suffer her to think that you are steeped to the lips in poverty; tell her a tale of hopeless prospects in this country, and of offers to amend your fortunes in a foreign clime: then ask her to become your wife. If her love be sincere, she will make every sacrifice rather than renounce you: if it be a mere gross passion, selfish and egotistical, she will refuse. By these means, my son, you will put her to the test. If she come out worthily from the ordeal, I will settle upon you two thousand a year: but if it prove otherwise, you will be rejoiced to think that you have escaped from your infatuation in respect to one so utterly undeserving of your regard.'—Thus

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spoke my father, Mr. Hawkshaw; and I came down to Gainsborough. For it is in the town of Gainsborough, at this moment, that for a few days the lady of whom I speak is staying: she is there on a temporary visit to some elderly relatives, who, though not so well off in the world as her own family, are nevertheless highly respectable."

The reader will perceive, in the latter portion of Frank's speech, those ingeniously contrived variations from the real circumstances of his story, which, while they did not impair the general truth of the narrative, were perfectly sufficient to conceal the identity of his heroine with Juliana Farefield.

"Having arrived in Gainsborough," he continued, "I dressed myself in this humble apparel which you see, and appeared before the young lady. I adopted the course which my father had recommended. But upon the details of the scene which ensued I cannot dwell farther than to give you the briefest outline possible. Would you believe it, Mr. Hawkshaw? she refused to bestow upon me her hand—but she shamelessly proposed to make me her pensioned paramour! She said that she would marry—she would contract a brilliant alliance—one that would give her riches; and that though she would take a husband's name, yet that my image alone should rule in her heart. I scorned her proposition—I repudiated it with loathing and horror. I fled from her presence. Cruelly excited, I wandered out of the town, along the bank of the river, not knowing nor caring whither I went."

"And it was under such circumstances as these, that I met you?" observed Mr. Hawkshaw, deeply sympathising with Frank's affliction. "Ah, my poor young friend! you had indeed enough upon your mind at the moment; and yet you could so generously bestow your ministrations upon me! You will forgive me for having made certain offers ——"

"Forgive you, Mr. Hawkshaw!" ejaculated the youth: "how can you address me in these terms? Shall I ever forget your generosity? You fancied me poor—you offered to give me a start in life—it was most kind, most noble! For the present there are circumstances which induce my father to preserve an *incognito* before the world—he has a nephew to reclaim: but rest assured that when the moment comes that there is no longer any need for preserving this mystery, I shall write to you from London—I shall tell you who he is—he himself will write to you—and he will thank you for your kindness towards his son. He bears one of the proudest names of the British aristocracy: and well assured am I that you, Mr. Hawkshaw, whenever you visit the metropolis, will be a welcome guest at his house."

"I shall be delighted, Mr. Paton," returned the Squire, "to renew in London at some future period the acquaintance that has commenced thus singularly between us in Lincolnshire. And perhaps I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again before long: for, as I just now hinted, I am about to change my bachelor condition for the marriage state: and after the nuptial ceremony I shall repair with my bride to London. Ah, my young friend! how different is she whom I shall soon lead to the altar, from the heartless creature of whom you have been speaking! The object of my affection is all amiability, virtue, and excellence. She has been reared by an affectionate mother—a woman of strong mind, and who knew how to perform her duty to her children. The object of your love is handsome, you say: so is the object of mine—grandly handsome!—but therein is the only point of similitude between the two. Ah! what a tale of shameless profligacy have you revealed to me. Thank heaven, you have been discreet and delicate enough not to mention that lady's name: for if by chance I ever met her in society, I could not possibly help testifying the contempt and abhorrence with which her conduct has inspired me. You have indeed experienced a most fortunate escape; and instead of being downcast and unhappy, you ought to be cheerful and glad."

Frank sighed—but made no answer: the image of Juliana had been too deeply impressed upon his heart to be effaced all in a moment; and he wished that she were far less beautiful than she was!

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a footman, to announce that the groom had returned from Gainsborough, accompanied by Mr. Paton's valet, who had brought his master's luggage with him.

"Now, my young friend," said the Squire, when the footman had withdrawn, "I do not intend to part with you so easily as perhaps you may imagine. You must at least give me two or three days of your company here. You need not go near Gainsborough—the residence of your faithless one: but I will do the best I can to amuse you. There is to be a grand ball at some friends of mine—the Denisons'—to-morrow evening: and I shall be delighted to introduce you. You will meet all the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood, with their families. Do not say *nay!* Would you pine and mope for the sake of a worthless woman? Come, Mr. Paton, take my advice—seek rational pleasure and recreation, as the best means of driving her image from your memory."

Frank had drunk half-a-dozen glasses of wine; and his spirits were already somewhat cheered. He thought the Squire's advice sound and good. It was not merely his wish, but also his duty, to triumph over the unfortunate attachment which he had formed. He had moreover received such kind hospitality from Mr. Hawkshaw, that he did not feel himself justified in running away the first thing in the morning. And now, another idea flashed to his mind. He had parted from Juliana, leaving her with the impression that he was indeed the poor humble and obscure youth he had represented himself to be: he regretted that he had not tarried at least long enough to make her aware that it was not really under such circumstances he had sued for her hand—but that he was merely putting her affection to the test. He did not wish to expose her to the world: but his own sense of pride would not suffer him to leave her under the impression that it was a poverty-stricken, homeless, broken-down youth whom she had rejected. And again, too—so long as she laboured under that impression, she might fancy that he had been only influenced by selfish motives in endeavouring to win as a wife the elder daughter of the proud and magnificent Lady Saxondale. He could not endure the thought of being deemed thus selfish—thus egotistical; and therefore did the idea suddenly spring up in his

mind that his own pride and sense of honour required that Juliana should be disabused upon all those points.

Now, it was reasonable to suppose that she would be at the ball on the ensuing evening. What if he were to appear there also? He would not expose her: he need not speak to her—he need not even seem to notice her: but she would see *him* there, elegantly dressed—introduced by Mr. Hawkshaw; and as the Squire was acquainted with her, he would no doubt take an opportunity of whispering in her ear "that Mr. Paton was a youth in whom he felt interested—that he had only recently discovered his parentage—that this was noble, though he himself was illegitimate—that his prospects were brilliant—and that he had a fortune at his command!"

Such were the thoughts which swept rapidly through the youth's mind; and perfectly consistent they were with his tender age—his inexperience in the world—and the natural feeling of pride that he entertained on account of his altered circumstances. Had he been twenty-eight instead of eighteen, he would have possibly reflected and acted otherwise: but as it was, he suddenly resolved upon the course which was thus chalked out. He accordingly accepted Mr. Hawkshaw's invitation to remain a day or two at the Hall; and the Squire was heartily glad at the decision to which he thus came.

Perceiving that his youthful guest was very much wearied, Mr. Hawkshaw proposed that he should retire for the night; and with a cordial shaking of the hands, they separated.

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE BALL.

WELL indeed might Francis Paton be wearied and exhausted, after the many long miles he had walked that day, and the excitement of mind through which he had passed. Scarcely, therefore, did he lay himself down to rest in the handsome but old-fashioned chamber to which he was shown, when sleep fell upon his eyelids.

On awaking in the morning, the sun was shining in at the window. He looked at his watch, and found that it was nearly ten o'clock. Springing from the couch, he rang the bell; and his valet soon made his appearance. All that Frank required of him was to put out a more suitable apparel than that which he had worn on the preceding day; and when this was done, Edward was dismissed while the youth performed his toilet—for he was neither affected or fastidious enough to need assistance during the process.

But while he was thus engaged, he reflected more seriously and more deliberately than he was enabled to do on the preceding evening, on the course he had resolved to adopt by appearing at the Denisons' ball. All the motives above specified, and which he had already weighed, remained undisturbed: but there was a danger, which now occurred to him that made him hesitate. What if Lady Saxondale should herself be at the ball, and should take it into her head to denounce him as the brother of a female highwayman?—thus renewing the malignant spirit in which she had expelled him from her mansion. Yet would she dare do this? would she take so bold a step when she found him in the companionship of a man of such evident wealth and standing as Mr. Hawkshaw? No: it was not probable. Besides, Frank could not see how her ladyship entertained any spite against himself: he was unaware that she had discovered his amour with her daughter; and therefore he came to the conclusion that if she beheld him at Mr. Denison's she would pass him by unnoticed—perhaps not even recognise him at all. But still there was another consideration: might not Juliana, on beholding him there, become overwhelmed with confusion, and thus betray to Mr. Hawkshaw that *she* was the lady of whom the Squire had heard so sad a tale? We have already said that Frank did not seek to expose her: he was too generous—too noble-minded—and there was a sufficiency of love lingering in his heart to render him averse to the infliction of any unnecessary pain upon Miss Farefield. Should he, then, go to that ball? Ah! did he not know that Juliana had an immense power of command over herself? Yes, surely;—and on second thoughts, he calculated she would pass him coldly by, with the air of one who had never seen him before in all her life. Therefore, everything considered, Frank decided upon remaining fixed in the resolve formed on the preceding evening.

Having completed his toilet, he descended to the breakfast-parlour; and Mr. Hawkshaw, who was already there, rose to welcome—not the poor-looking youth of the previous day—but an elegantly dressed young gentleman. The Squire had been up for hours: as early as seven o'clock he was galloping over his estate; and returning by nine, had taken a tankard of ale and a somewhat massive sandwich to allay the cravings of hunger until his guest should descend to the breakfast-table. And sumptuously provided was this breakfast-table, to which they both sat down: the board literally groaned beneath cold viands, pies, and poultry—ham and tongue—various sorts of potted meats and marmalade—besides some fish, fresh caught from the river that morning. The Squire did the most ample justice to his own good things: and if he had confessed to Frank the little incident of the tankard of ale and the huge sandwich, the youth would have stared in most unfeigned wonder at the havoc which Mr. Hawkshaw was still enabled to make among the comestibles.

"I have been thinking, Mr. Paton," said the open-hearted gentleman, "what I can best do to amuse you to-day. I sha'n't offer to take and introduce you to any of my friends in the neighbourhood; because I know that the mere ceremony of morning calls is irksome and uninviting enough. Besides, you will see all the *elite* of the county at the Denisons' in the evening; and then you can take your choice in respect to those whose acquaintance you may choose to form. I myself usually make one call every day," he added, with a smile; "and you can guess upon whom—the lady who is to be Mrs. Hawkshaw: but I will send a note presently to excuse myself for this one occasion——"

"I beg and beseech that you will do nothing of the sort," interrupted Frank. "I should be truly sorry to deprive you of the pleasure of paying your accustomed visit. I myself shall be well pleased to ramble through your beautiful grounds——"

"No, my dear Mr. Paton," said the Squire; "I am not going to leave you to your own resources.

So not another word upon that subject. But, by the bye, did you go and have a look at Saxondale Castle yesterday? Ah! I dare say you were in no humour for anything of the kind——"

"Nevertheless," responded Frank, successfully concealing the agitation which this allusion to Juliana's home conjured up, "I did approach near enough to that fine old edifice to see as much as I cared for. But I have no great taste that way: I feel no particular interest in seeing antique buildings. I would much rather go and take a long ride or walk through the midst of the charming scenery which I behold from this window."

"As for walking, my dear Mr. Paton," replied Hawkshaw, with a smile, "you must have had enough of it yesterday: so if you please, we will take a good ride together. According to your proficiency in horsemanship, can I accommodate you. If you like a somewhat spirited steed, be it so: but if you prefer a quiet gentle animal, but a fast trotter withal, such a one shall be at your service."

"I must confess," said Frank, "that I should prefer the latter: for I cannot pretend to have any equestrian skill at all."

The Squire and his guest now rose from the breakfast-table, and proceeded to the stables. Mr. Hawkshaw possessed a large stud, comprising some of the finest horses in the county. He had a pack of hounds and harriers; and an hour was spent in the inspection of the equine and canine departments of his spacious establishment. All the while he conversed with such frankness of heart and in such cheerful spirits, that young Paton felt himself considerably elevated from the despondency and gloom into which he had previously been plunged. It was impossible not to catch some portion of the Squire's exhilaration: besides, Frank was little more than eighteen years of age, and that was not a time of life when disappointment in love renders the victim so utterly disconsolate as to think seriously of quitting the world and turning hermit.

Mr. Hawkshaw and his youthful guest, mounting the horses that were gotten in readiness for them, rode forth across the country. There was a variety of beautiful scenery on the Squire's estate, with the contemplation of which Frank was much charmed: for his was a mind that could appreciate the loveliness of nature, and receive, as it were, poetic inspirations therefrom. Nor less was he in reality curious and interested with regard to fine specimens of architecture: he had therefore done himself an injustice when at the breakfast-table he affected an indifference with regard to Saxondale Castle. But this, as the reader has no doubt understood, he did for the purpose of preventing Mr. Hawkshaw from starting a proposal to take him in that direction.

After a long ride, a farm-house was reached, where the Squire purposed to halt and take lunch. He was well known there, although it was not upon his own estate; and most welcome were he and Frank made by the occupants of the homestead. Having refreshed themselves, they remounted their horses and returned to the Hall by another route, so that Frank had farther opportunities of beholding the charming scenery of that part of the country. It was about four o'clock when they reached the mansion; and the interval until dinner time was occupied by an inspection of the interior of the house itself. There was a fine library, consisting chiefly of old works accumulated by Mr. Hawkshaw's father, who was much more of a book-worm than his son and successor. There was likewise a fine gallery of pictures; and there were a few good busts and statues. Thus, in the inspection of these objects of interest, the time passed away quickly enough till six o'clock, when dinner was served up. After the repast Frank and the Squire adjourned to their respective chambers, to dress for the grand ball that was to take place at the Denisons' that evening.

It was with a beating heart that Frank performed this toilet; and now he *did* suffer his page Edward to assist him: for he was resolved to lose none of the advantages that dress might bestow. Not that he entertained the slightest idea of endeavouring to assert so complete an empire over the heart of Juliana, as to pave the way for a reconciliation, to be crowned by marriage. No: he vowed within himself that everything should indeed be at an end between herself and him. But if the plain truth must be spoken, it was with a feeling of boyish vanity, natural and intelligible enough, that Frank on the present occasion made the best of all the resources and advantages of the toilet which were at his disposal. When it was achieved, he could not be otherwise than well satisfied with his own appearance: for he looked eminently handsome. The well-cut garments set off his slender and symmetrical figure to the fullest advantage: the evening costume became his somewhat feminine style of beauty most admirably. The flutter of his heart's feelings sent up the colour to his cheeks, which were usually of a classic paleness; and when he descended to the room where Mr. Hawkshaw was waiting for him, the worthy Squire felt quite proud of the interesting youth whom he was about to introduce to the circle of his acquaintances; for he foresaw that Frank's presence there would cause a complete sensation.

The old-fashioned chariot,—which had belonged to the Squire's grandfather, and which the Squire himself so very seldom used, save and except when going to evening parties,—was in readiness soon after eight o'clock. The place of destination was about seven miles distant; and it was reached at nine: for in the country such entertainments as these commence at an earlier hour than in London. Mr. Denison's mansion was of an immense size, and contained suites of apartments spacious and lofty enough to remind one of the baronial halls of former times. The family itself has already been spoken of as one of the oldest and richest in all Lincolnshire. The father and mother were kind-hearted hospitable persons: the old gentleman was sure to form a friendship for any one who would praise his wines—the lady was as certain to take a liking to any one who appeared to relish the substantial fare served up at her board. They had several sons and daughters, most of them married and settled in different parts of the same county: these were all present at the ball of which we are speaking. Most of the guests had arrived when Mr. Hawkshaw's carriage drove up to the front of the mansion. There were perhaps three hundred persons altogether assembled; and, as the Squire had hinted to his youthful companion, these consisted of the *elite* of the entire neighbourhood for several miles round.

It was with a heart beating more violently than while performing his toilet or during the drive thither, that Francis Paton, arm-in-arm with Mr. Hawkshaw, followed the powdered lacquey up the spacious and well-lighted staircase, to the first of the suite of rooms which were thrown open for the reception of the company. It was here—in what was called the Ante-Room—that Mr. and Mrs. Denison had stationed themselves to receive their guests. Immediately upon crossing that threshold, Frank swept his quick glances around: but amongst the ladies and gentlemen who were lounging there previous to passing into the next apartment, which was called the Saloon, he discerned not Juliana Farefield. The footman announced Mr. Hawkshaw in a loud voice; Mr. and Mrs. Denison at once came forward to receive him. Cordial shakings of the hand took place; and the Squire hastened to observe, "Permit me to introduce a young and very particular friend of mine—Mr. Paton. He is on a visit to me at the Hall; and I have taken the liberty of bringing him hither, knowing that he would be welcome."

"We are delighted to see Mr. Paton," said Mrs. Denison, at once, and with more cordiality than would have been shown in the less genial circles of London fashionable life, extending her hand to greet the youth.

"Any friend of *my* friend Hawkshaw," said old Mr. Denison, "is sure to receive a kind welcome here:"—and he in his turn shook Frank by the hand.

Some other guests were announced at the moment; and the Squire, accompanied by Frank, strolled into the Saloon, where the bulk of the company were assembled, and where tea and coffee were served up. This was an immense apartment; and it was not with the first quickly sweeping glance that Frank was enabled to discern whether Juliana was there or not. All around—on chairs, ottomans, or sofas—elegantly apparelled ladies and well-dressed gentlemen were seated. Here and there small groups were standing to converse: and in other parts ladies were sitting, while gathered around them, was a knot of young gentlemen standing in that gracefully lounging attitude which is so often seen. The immense apartment was flooded with the light poured forth by three superb lustres, and which was reflected in the magnificent mirrors, as well as by the diamonds and the costly ornaments worn by the guests. Amongst the female portion thereof, there was no insignificant display of beauty; and bright eyes, as well as mirrors and gems, shone brighter in the powerful effulgence streaming from the lustres.

Mr. Hawkshaw, with Frank on his arm, strolled through the Saloon, nodding familiarly to those with whom he was most intimate—bowing more formally to those with whom he was less acquainted—and also looking around to see if a certain lady-guest had yet arrived. Need we say that the object of his eyes' research was Juliana Farefield?—and thus was it that, without having the most distant suspicion of the fact, he and his young friend were both alike on the look-out for one and the same being. She was not however there; and having reached the extremity of the room, the Squire and Frank sat down, while a footman hastened to serve them with coffee.

As Mr. Hawkshaw had foreseen, Frank's appearance at once created much curiosity and interest. All eyes had followed him as he walked through the apartment, leaning on the Squire's arm: the exquisite beauty of his countenance—his symmetrical and graceful figure—the aristocratic polish which appeared to invest him as naturally as if he had passed all his life in patrician halls, attracted the notice of every one present, and made him the "observed of all observers." Who has he—this interesting young stranger? Such appeared to be the general question, whispered in some parts of the room—asked by means of a rapid exchange of glances in others. The Squire and Frank did not remain long alone where they had seated themselves: some of the principal male guests approached to shake hands with their friend Hawkshaw—and they were of course introduced to Mr. Paton. A little knot was soon collected there; and the youth became engaged in discourse with his new acquaintances. Presently Mr. Denison approached; and seizing an opportunity when Frank was talking to some others, the old gentleman whispered to Hawkshaw, "You have brought us quite an acquisition this evening. I can assure you that a great number of ladies have already been asking Mrs. Denison who the interesting young stranger is."

"He is connected with one of the highest and noblest families of the British Aristocracy," responded the Squire aside to Mr. Denison. "He is well off, too," he added with a smile; "and if it be any satisfaction to the fair sex, you may safely whisper that on the day of his marriage his father will give him a fortune of a couple of thousand a-year."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Denison. "He certainly is a most interesting and fascinating youth. Does he purpose to make a long stay in Lincolnshire?"

"I am afraid not," responded Hawkshaw. "I mean to keep him as long as I possibly can: but I know that he is very anxious to get back to London."

"That's a pity," rejoined the old gentleman. "However, we must make the most of him while he *is* in the county. By the bye," he added jocularly, at the same time poking the Squire in the ribs, "are you serious in your intentions in a certain quarter? ——you know where I mean. Come now, Hawkshaw, don't make a mystery of it. All the county is talking of your constant visits to the Castle. But it is also rumoured that Lady Saxondale herself is likely to change her condition—and that Lord Harold Staunton is to be the happy man. I don't know how true it may be: but you at least ought to be in the secret."

"Well, I suppose," responded the Squire, laughing, though amidst some little degree of confusion, "there is no use making a mystery of it. All that you have surmised is correct. But don't go and tell every body that I am engaged to Miss Farefield. I only proposed yesterday; and you are the first person outside the walls of Saxondale Castle that I have mentioned it to. I would much rather keep it as quiet as possible till the event comes off: for when these things get known, one is stared at, and so bantered—and I really can't bear jesting on such a point."

"Well, well," answered Mr. Denison, laughing in his turn, "I will keep your secret, Hawkshaw. But

scruple to leave him for a few minutes while he proceeded to pay his respects to Lady Saxondale and Juliana. Mr. Denison then took Frank's arm; and gently leading him away into the ball-room, still continued to converse in the most affable manner, though upon general and indifferent topics. They passed though the ball-room—traversed a smaller apartment—and then entered a conservatory filled with evergreens, orange-trees, rare plants from the tropics, and a variety of choice flowers. This place was lighted with wax-candles; and in its coolness was most refreshing after the heated atmosphere of the other rooms.

"My dear young friend—for so you must permit me to call you," said Mr. Denison, "I wish to know whether there be any way in which I can serve you? whether you need the counsel or succour of one who feels a deep interest in you? But stay!" he exclaimed, perceiving that the youth gazed upon him in surprise: "read this—and then you will understand wherefore I am thus familiarly addressing you."

Frank took the letter which Mr. Denison handed him; and having perused it, he remained lost in thought for upwards of a minute, while a profound sadness settled upon his countenance.

Mr. Denison," at length he said, "I return you my sincerest thanks for the kind feeling you have demonstrated towards me. Before I left London, my father mentioned that he had an old friend residing in this county, to whom he offered to give me a letter of introduction: but I thought not that my stay would be prolonged——indeed, it was by mere accident that I became Mr. Hawkshaw's guest——"

"Then Mr. Hawkshaw is acquainted with all to which this letter alludes?" said Mr. Denison, inquiringly.

"No," responded Frank; "he knows nothing beyond the mere fact that my parents are rich and noble—and that I myself, alas! am the offspring of a love which, at the time of my birth, bore not the sanction of marriage."

"But the purpose for which you are come into Lincolnshire?" said Mr. Denisen.

"Yes—Mr. Hawkshaw is to a certain extent acquainted with that," rejoined Frank. "It is somewhat a long tale to tell——"

"And evidently not a pleasant one," interrupted the worthy old gentleman, grasping the youth's hand and pressing it kindly. "We will not converse any more upon the subject now. To-morrow you and the Squire must come across and dine with us. For the present, endeavour, my dear young friend, to enjoy yourself and enter into the gaieties of the evening. And now let us return to the Saloon, where Mrs. Denison will be proud to find you a suitable partner."

Again taking the youth's arm, Mr. Denison conducted him away from the conservatory, through the ball-room, back into the Saloon.

In the meantime Squire Hawkshaw, as already stated, had proceeded to pay his respects to Lady Saxondale and Juliana, who were seated with Mrs. Denison. He placed himself next to his intended; and for the first few minutes the conversation was confined to mere drawing-room generalities; but Juliana, as well as her mother, was convinced by the Squire's manner that he had heard not a syllable from Francis Paton's lips to alter his sentiments in any way with regard to the former.

"By the bye," observed Lady Saxondale, after a brief pause in the discourse, "you have a friend here with you this evening, Mr. Hawkshaw?"

"Yes—and it was owing to that horse of mine,—you know," he continued with a smile, "to which I allude?—that I formed Mr. Paton's acquaintance. In short, I met with a little accident yesterday—I did not mean to tell you of it—but since it is necessary to account for my falling in with that very interesting young man——"

"An accident?" said Juliana, in a low tone, and pretending to fling upon the Squire a look full of apprehension, which Mrs. Denison could not help noticing; and she was at no loss to suspect the cause, although she certainly little thought that it was assumed.

"Oh! but it was nothing, I can assure you," said the Squire. "I was thrown at a gate—not leaping it—it was all my own fault—sheer carelessness on my part——However, Mr. Paton, who was passing along at the time, rendered me the requisite assistance; and the result was his visit to me at the Hall."

"And does he purpose to make a long stay in Lincolnshire?" asked Lady Saxondale, as if merely in a conversational manner.

"No—it was with some difficulty I could induce him to remain a day or two with me. He is a well connected youth——"

"Do you know anything of his family?" inquired Lady Saxondale, still with the same seeming indifference.

"No—but I have heard enough from his lips to be assured that he is of the highest respectability. Indeed, his whole appearance,—his manner—his conversation, stamp him as the well-bred young gentleman."

Lady Saxondale drew herself up slightly, but made no farther remark: she remembered her compact with Juliana, and did not choose to violate it.

"I dare say," observed Mr. Hawkshaw, addressing himself to Miss Farefield, "that you will become acquainted with my young friend in the course of the evening, and I am sure you will be pleased with him."

Mrs. Denison was at the moment making some remark to Lady Saxondale; and Juliana said, in a low quick whisper, to Mr. Hawkshaw, but with an arch smile upon her countenance, "And shall you not be jealous, my dear George, if you see me dancing with that handsome youth whom you have brought hither to turn all the ladies' heads?"

"Not I indeed!" he responded, also with a smile, but which was as replete with frankness and ingenuous confidence as that of his intended was hypocritical and feigned. "I think too highly of you, my dearest Juliana, to be jealous."

"I am glad to hear you speak thus," she responded, "But have you mentioned to Mr. Paton that—that——we are engaged?"

"No: I don't talk of those things. Of course the Denisons and many others suspect it——"

"To be sure!" rejoined Juliana: "but I agree with you it is much better to say as little as possible on such a subject. How elegantly Mr. Paton is dressed!"—and this remark she made to endeavour

if possible to elicit from the Squire the cause of the discrepancy between the youth's apparel on the present occasion and that which he had worn on the preceding day.

"Yes—he dresses with great elegance. But," added the Squire, laughing, "it was not exactly so when I first met him yesterday. He told me in confidence what brought him into Lincolnshire: and I should not breathe a syllable to anybody else but yourself——"

"Ah! dearest George, you and I, you know," observed the wily Juliana, with a tender glance, "have no secrets from each other; and whatever you may tell me, is of course sacred and inviolable."

"Poor fellow!" continued the Squire, still speaking in a subdued undertone: "he is over head and ears in love—or rather *was*——"

"Ah! then he is not now? Does he consider himself fortunate in his escape?"—and it was with a palpitating heart but with unmoved countenance that Juliana asked the question.

"Well, I think he has good reason to believe himself so. But pray don't mention a word of all this to your mother or any one else."

"Not for the world!" rejoined Juliana. "Pray go on. I see that there is something very romantic and interesting about this youth—all the more interesting too, my dear George," she added with witching cajolery, "since you yourself have formed a friendship for him."

"The fact is," proceeded Hawkshaw, "he was in love with some lady whose name he very discreetly suppressed, and of course I did not question him upon the subject——"

"A lady in this neighbourhood?"

"Properly belonging to London, but staying at Gainsborough just for the present. My young friend's fortunes have recently changed: so he came to put her to the test—dressing himself out in the shabbiest and meanest style——"

"Oh, what a device!" observed Juliana: and she affected to titter gaily, while inwardly she was racked with the bitterest feelings. "And what was the result?"

"Unpropitious to my young friend's views. But where is he?" suddenly exclaimed Hawkshaw. "I left him with Mr. Denison at the other end of the room. Pray excuse me for a minute—I must not leave him alone, as he is a perfect stranger here: he will feel awkward and embarrassed in the midst of a crowd of persons unknown to him. And mind, dear Juliana—not a syllable to your mother of all I have been telling you!"

"Oh, fear not, dear George! You know you can trust me."

Mr. Hawkshaw flung upon her a look full of tenderness; and then rising from the seat where he had been carrying on this whispered discourse with Juliana—while her mother and Mrs. Denison were conversing together on their side—the Squire proceeded towards the ball-room. At that instant Mr. Denison and young Paton were returning into the Saloon; and they accordingly encountered the Squire on the threshold between the two apartments.

"I shall leave you, Mr. Paton, with your friend Hawkshaw for a few minutes," said the worthy old gentleman, "while I go in search of Mrs. Denison that she may do the honours of the house towards you."

With these words he hurried away, and was traversing the Saloon, when he perceived his wife in company with Lady Saxondale and Juliana. He immediately accosted the group, saying to his spouse, "I was looking for you, my dear, that you may fulfil your intention of introducing Mr. Paton to Miss Farefield."

"Mr. Paton's appearance beneath your roof, Mr. Denison," said Lady Saxondale, "seems to have excited quite a sensation. I have been asking Mr. Hawkshaw who his young friend is——"

"And Mr. Hawkshaw has told you, mother," interrupted Juliana, with a quick deprecating look at her parent—as much as to remind her of the previously expressed desire that she would not meddle in the matter,—"Mr. Hawkshaw has told you precisely what Mr. Denison himself had already stated."

"To be sure!" ejaculated this gentleman. "Am I to understand that there is the slightest doubt as to Mr. Paton's respectability?"

"Oh, far from it!" exclaimed Juliana. "My mother could not possibly mean such a thing. It is sufficient to find Mr. Paton within these walls to be assured of his respectability."

"But what is more," rejoined Mr. Denison emphatically, "I can answer for it—I will guarantee it. There may perhaps be some little mystery attending him, but which will all be cleared up in good time. Suffice it to say that I know who he is——"

"Indeed!" said Lady Saxondale, fixing her eyes keenly upon the old gentleman, to ascertain, if possible, to what extent his knowledge thus reached.

"Yes—I know that his father is a nobleman of very high rank," responded Mr. Denison.

"Is this youth, then, the Hon. Mr. Paton?" inquired Lady Saxondale: "or Lord Paton —— or——"

"Unfortunately," answered Mr. Denison, in a subdued voice, "there is a circumstance connected with his birth——But I need say no more—— Suffice it to add that I *do* know who his father is—he is a very old friend of mine—immensely rich, and fully able to give his son a proud position in the world."

"Dear me, Mr. Denison," said his wife, "how came you to learn all this? I am sure I am delighted to hear it; for I felt quite an interest in that youth the moment I beheld him——"

"This is no time for explanations," interrupted Mr. Denison. "I only tell you what I know and what I will guarantee. Come, my dear," he added, still speaking to his wife, "let Mr. Paton join the next quadrille with Miss Farefield, if she will permit us to introduce him?"

"Oh! with much pleasure," said Juliana, in a most courteous and affable manner.

Thereupon Mr. and Mrs. Denison hastened away to fetch Frank; and Juliana whispered quickly to her mother, "You perceive therefore that Hawkshaw has not been misinformed, and that the youth has not devised any false statements."

"It is altogether a mystery," replied her ladyship, "which I cannot comprehend."

"But at which I am less astonished than you, mother," responded Juliana: "for I all along knew that there were strange things connected with the parentage of Francis Paton."

"He is approaching, Juliana," said Lady Saxondale. "Take care, take care how you play your cards—or you will lose Mr. Hawkshaw."

A few moments after these words were uttered, the Denisons came up with Frank; and the lady of the house introduced him in the usual manner. Lady Saxondale bowed with a cold and distant reserve—Juliana with as much affable courtesy as under the circumstances she dared show: but with all the power of control she was enabled to exercise over her feelings, she could not prevent the colour from coming and going rapidly on her cheeks. Frank, on the other hand, was very pale, but perfectly collected. As he gave his arm to Juliana, he felt that her head trembled as it touched him; and a galvanic gush of indescribable emotions was sent thrilling through his entire form.

CHAPTER C.

THE CONSERVATORY.

Mrs. Denison remained in conversation with Lady Saxondale—Mr. Denison hastened to receive some fresh arrivals of gentlemen—Juliana and Frank passed on into the ball-room, neither of them giving utterance to a single word. Mr. Hawkshaw, well pleased in the generosity of his heart to perceive that his young friend had thus become introduced to his intended bride, joined a knot of gentlemen who, like himself, did not dance, and fell into conversation with them.

Frank and Juliana entered the ball-room. The first quadrille had just terminated: in a few minutes the second would commence. They took a seat during the interval. Both felt the embarrassment of their position: but each was inspired with very different sentiments from those which animated the other. On the one hand Frank merely wished to assure himself that Juliana was already acquainted, through the medium of Mr. Hawkshaw or Mr. Denison, with his altered position: but if not, it was his purpose to make it known, so far as he dared with due regard to his father's *incognito*. When once this should have been accomplished, there need be no farther intercourse between them: for although Frank could not so suddenly fling off the spells which the lady's beauty and fascinations had cast upon him, yet was he firmly resolved not to suffer himself to be betrayed into any weakness.

On the other hand, Juliana felt that she had a difficult and delicate course to pursue. She had no longer any doubt, after all she had just been hearing, that Frank's social position was indeed greatly changed; and she was most anxious to learn whether he would now constitute a match sufficiently eligible to warrant her in jilting Mr. Hawkshaw. If so, she was prepared to take that step. Although now acquainted with the stratagem which Frank had executed to put her to the test, she had such confidence in her own charms, her fascinations, and her endearments, as to flatter herself that she need only bring them all into full play in order to reduce him to the condition of a suppliant at her feet. Nevertheless, with all her natural effrontery—with all her spirit of intrigue—with all her worldly-minded calculating disposition, she could not help feeling embarrassed and awkward during the first few minutes they were thus thrown together on the present occasion. Moreover, her pride would not suffer her to be the first to break the silence which still reigned between them; and there was also a certain amount of rancour and bitterness in her mind at the test to which young Paton had so ingeniously put her.

Frank likewise experienced all the awkwardness of this silence; and if he did not immediately speak, it was that he knew not how to commence the conversation. He more than half regretted having placed himself in such a position. He began to comprehend that it was his own little pride and boyish vanity, more than anything else, that had all along urged him to be present at this ball; and he felt somewhat humiliated in his own eyes—lessened in his own conceit—diminished in his own opinion, at the thought that he should have been guilty of such weakness. But soon he began to reflect that having become Miss Farefield's companion for the present, he had no right to treat her with a reserve or coolness that could not fail to be shortly noticed by other couples lounging or sitting in the ball-room; and notwithstanding all circumstances, he saw that he was bound to treat her at least with a show of external courtesy and politeness.

"Do you prefer to remain seated here, Miss Farefield?" he inquired, not knowing what else to say: "or would you rather walk a little?"

"I am perfectly well contented," she responded, "to do whichever *Mr. Paton* thinks fit:"—and as she thus spoke, in a tone of mingled reproach and archness, she accentuated his name.

"The quadrille is about to commence," he said: "shall we stand up and take our places?"

"With pleasure. Are you fond of dancing?"

"Perhaps," he rejoined, in a cold ironical tone, "you meant to ask me whether I *could* dance? You forget, Miss Farefield, that I was well educated and trained at Southampton, before circumstances reduced me to a menial condition."

"This observation on your part, Mr. Paton," she replied, in a voice that trembled as if her feelings were indeed much hurt, "is most ungenerous and uncalled for. When I asked you if you were fond of dancing, I meant no more than would have been intended by yourself, had you put the same question to me. I think, Mr. Paton, if you will condescend to tax your memory, you will find that while you were as yet in ignorance of your parentage, I expressed the conviction that your birth was infinitely superior to your condition at the time."

"True!" murmured Frank: and the recollection that Juliana had spoken nothing but the exact truth, struck him with a feeling savouring of remorse for the coolness which he himself was now maintaining towards her: moreover, he felt that he had been unjust in the harsh rebuke he had administered—a rebuke, too, which according to her assurance she had so little deserved.

"Yes—it is indeed true that I thus spoke to you at the time," she said, perceiving that there was a change in his countenance, and penetrating the feeling which had produced it. "Had it not been my conviction that you were of gentle birth, never, never——But I ought not to be speaking thus! After what took place yesterday, I presume that I am to consider everything to be at an end between us?"

"Miss Farefield," answered Frank, again recovering the perfect mastery over himself, "I have a few words of explanation to address to you: but it is impossible they can be spoken in this ball-room. For your sake, much more than for mine, the greatest discretion must be used. When the dance is over, if you will favour me with a few minutes' attention, we may perhaps find an opportunity to speak in that conservatory which opens from the adjoining apartment."

The quadrille now commenced; and Juliana, perceiving at a glance that Mr. Hawkshaw was not amongst the lookers-on in the ball-room, resolved to play off all the artillery of her charms upon Francis Paton—but at the same time not to do this in a manner that should be noticed by the guests generally: for if in the long run she should either lose Frank, or else come to the conclusion that Mr. Hawkshaw was the preferable match, she did not

wish to stand a chance of alienating the latter. But there are a thousand and one ways in which an artful and designing woman can play the game of witchery and fascination unperceived by those around. A tender glance quickly darted and as quickly withdrawn—a gentle pressure of the hand—a half-stifled sigh, to be heard only by him whose ears it is specially intended to reach—and that momentary fond clinging which the routine of the dance allows—these are the means by which the artful fair one may, under such circumstances, conduct the campaign against the object of her wiles.

Frank saw it all—felt it all—but could not comprehend it all. Did she really love him? did she regret the scene of yesterday? was she making as much amends as, without too much self-prostration of her own pride, she could possibly offer? ought he to pardon the circumstances of the previous day? ought he to make allowances for them, considering her position? In a word, what ought he to do? what ought he to think? He was bewildered: and he was too young, as well as having been but too recently under the spells of this dangerous woman, to remain insensible to those pressures of the hand—those tender looks—those softly subdued sighs—those transient but raptured clingings to him in the mazes of the dance. And it was not all acting nor simulation on Juliana's part: for, as the reader is aware, she did love this beautiful youth—that is to say, loved him after the fashion of her own sensuous nature; and at all events it was a strong passion on her part. But at length the dance was done: the couples promenaded round the room—and Frank conducted Juliana into the adjacent one. Thither they strolled without the appearance of premeditated design, and as any others might have done. No one was there: they passed into the conservatory—and here likewise they were alone.

We should observe that Miss Farefield was dressed for the present occasion in a style of simple elegance. She was arrayed in white: for the olive of her skin was of that delicate and transparent tint which rendered this virgin attire perfectly compatible with her complexion and her style of beauty. Indeed, it served to set it off to the utmost advantage. She usually wore her hair in bands: but this evening she appeared with it showering in myriads of luxuriant ringlets down upon her shoulders! Oh, how bright was the gloss upon that raven hair! how it shone with a natural glory, all its own! A single camelia with a circlet of pearls made it look darker than the darkest night: and yet it was a lustrous cloud which thus framed the superb countenance. The low *corsage* of the dress displayed the sculptural richness of the bust: the excitement of the dance and of her own feelings sent the rich blood glowing and mantling upon her cheeks. Altogether she appeared of a more splendid beauty on this occasion than ever she had seemed before in the eyes of Francis Paton. He felt troubled and bewildered, fully aware that the spell of almost irresistible fascinations was upon him, yet equally well-knowing that it was his duty to shake them off—and more than half fearing, as he had thought on the previous day, that this splendid creature was but a snake wearing the loveliest skin.

"And now, Frank," she said, in a low melting murmuring voice, and fixing upon him those lustrous eyes that were brimfull of passion, "you have some words to address to me. Remember that we cannot remain too long here—we shall be missed—we shall be sought after——"

"Miss Farefield," responded the youth, endeavouring to speak as coldly and collectedly as he could, "I will not detain you many minutes."

"Wherefore do you address me in this formal manner?" she asked, with reproachful look and voice. "Am I no longer *Juliana* to you?"

"How can you be?" exclaimed Frank, at this moment feeling that he had regained complete power over himself, as all the incidents in the arbour on the preceding day trooped through his mind. "Did you not tell me that you meant to marry another? By what right, then, can I address you with the insolence of familiarity?"

"Insolence—familiarity! Oh, dearest Frank, is it possible that such words as these are to pass between us?"

"Listen, Miss Farefield," interrupted the youth, drawing himself up in a dignified manner. "Yesterday I offered you my hand—and you refused it. It is therefore as a rejected suitor that I stand before you. Think you not that I have my own feelings of pride? and is it possible that what took place in that arbour can be recalled? No—impossible! But I would not have you think that I was selfish and egotistical in seeking the hand of the elder daughter of the titled and brilliant Lady Saxondale! Circumstances have much altered with me of late—but not in the sense that I gave you to understand yesterday. It is true that what the world may call *a stigma* rests upon my birth: nevertheless my parents are of noble rank—my father possesses immense wealth—and he will shower riches upon my head. He and my mother are now married: they are acquainted with the love which I had cherished for you——"

"Ah, then, dear Frank, you did love me—Oh, you did love me! and you must love me still!"—and as Juliana thus spoke, she threw her arm around the youth's neck; and ere he could disengage himself from her embrace, she had imprinted a kiss upon his lips.

Nevertheless he did so disengage himself: for he had been speaking of his father and his mother—their images were now in his mind—he remembered his duty towards them—he remembered the counsel he had received—and he was determined to follow it.

"You draw yourself away from me," said Juliana: and she spoke coldly and distantly, for her pride had just sustained a severe shock.

"You told me that you would marry another—and whoever the man of your choice may be," responded Frank, "I will not be guilty of any outrage towards him."

"Ah, all this is intended as a bitter sarcasm to myself!"—and now tears started forth from Juliana's eyes—but tears of mingled spite and vexation.

"Do not weep," said Frank, much moved: for he comprehended not the true source of those tears. "Heaven forbid that I should speak sarcastically or upbraidingly towards you! I only reminded you of your duty—or rather proclaimed what I felt to be mine."

"Ah! now you speak kinder, Frank—and I am soothed," said Juliana, taking his hand which was not immediately withdrawn: and she pressed it

tenderly. "Think you not that I am delighted to hear of this change of fortune which you have experienced? Yes—most sincerely do I congratulate you!—and all the more so, because, as you remember, I foresaw it. I all along knew, from the very first moment I beheld you, that you were above your condition—infinitely above it! You told me as much of your history which you yourself knew at the time: do you not mean to make me your confidante in respect to the remainder? Who is your father, Frank? Do not think that I ask out of mere curiosity——"

"Miss Farefield, I cannot tell you now. Suffice it to say that his title is that of a Marquis."

"*Miss Farefield*——still *Miss Farefield!*" she murmured reproachfully and sorrowfully: "is the rupture then complete between us? O Frank, I forgive you for the cruel test to which you put me yesterday: will not you forgive me for what fell from my lips? You say that your parents are acquainted with our love: was it they who suggested that you should put me to such a test?"

"It was," rejoined Frank: "I do not attempt to deny it. But pray understand me. That test I regarded as conclusive! I fled from you in disappointment—in despair. I did not pause to tell you that the representations I had made were false—that I had purposely apparelled myself in mean clothing to give a colour to my story: I did not wait to tell you all this, because I was not master of my feelings at the time. But subsequently, on calmer reflection, I felt that I could not leave Lincolnshire without giving you the fullest explanations. I did not wish to pass in your eyes as a miserable needy adventurer, seeking a patrician marriage as the stepping-stone to better fortunes. I felt that if you looked upon me in this light you would have but too good reason to despise me, and to rejoice that you had refused me your hand. But this is what I wish you to understand—that inasmuch as you loved me when I was poor, and humble, and obscure, I felt proud and rejoiced at the thought that fortune had suddenly placed me in a position when I might on terms of equality offer you my hand. Ah! had you told me yesterday, Juliana—Miss Farefield, I mean—that no matter how poor and humble I might still be, you would sacrifice everything to become my wife, how different would our feelings be at this moment! Now I have no more to say. Let me conduct you back into the other rooms."

"No—not yet, Frank—not yet!" murmured Juliana, again clinging to him—but not kissing him this time, only looking up earnestly and appealingly into his countenance. "You have said all that you have to say: hear me a few words in reply. It is true that I spoke to you yesterday in a manner that may have shocked you: but did I not likewise speak with tenderness and with love? Did I not offer to make every sacrifice that one in my position could possibly consummate? If I dreaded poverty, it was as much on your account as on my own—perhaps more on your's. To acquire gold therefore, that I might conduce to your comfort, I said that I would marry: and how great must my love be for you, when I was enabled to tutor my soul to think of the marriage-tie as a mere expedient for ensuring our happiness, and not as a barrier against it! Do you not think, Frank," continued the wily Juliana—but still tender and impassioned, even at the time when she was thus exercising all her astuteness and all the powers of her sophistry,—"do you not think, Frank, that it cost me a pang to propose that I would become a wife only to deceive a husband in order that the progress of our loves might continue uninterrupted? But perhaps you consider me a being lost to all sense of delicacy and propriety——Oh, Frank, can it be possible that you entertain such an evil opinion of one who loves you so tenderly and so well?"

She was still clinging to him as she thus spoke: she was gazing up into his countenance with a look of the most tender and impassioned appeal: she had thrown into her voice all the most melting cadences of its natural harmony: she omitted no single one of the many blandishments which a woman of artful nature and glowing temperament could possibly exercise on such an occasion. Again was Frank bewildered and troubled—again was he uncertain how to act or what to think. He disengaged himself not from the half-embrace in which she retained him; but he averted his countenance as if the only hope that remained for him was in not beholding that beautiful—too beautiful face, which was upturned towards his own.

"Frank," she continued, thoroughly prepared to jilt Mr. Hawkshaw if young Paton would now succumb to her wiles,—"Frank, is it possible that you can forget the interview of yesterday? Is it possible to efface it from your mind—to blot it out from your memory? If so, ask me once more whether I will accompany you to the altar. Ah, it is a hard thing for a young lady of my rank and position to have to put this restraint upon her feelings and do this violence to her pride, which I am doing now, when suing to him who is of that sex which generally sues to mine! Yes, Frank—I ask you to recall your decision of yesterday: I beseech you not to judge me by it. I tell you that if you still love me—if you think that you can be happy with me—it will be the most joyous day of my life when I take your name and look upon you as my husband. And, Frank," she continued, in a still softer, more tremulous, and more murmuring voice, "remember that I have some claim alike upon your indulgence and your love: for am not I already the same as your wife in the sight of heaven?"

This last appeal completed the trouble and bewilderment which were influencing young Paton at the moment. He felt that it had gone to his very heart—that there was as much justice as there was truth in it—that he owed her forgiveness because he owed her reparation. Infatuated boy! he did not pause to reflect at the moment that it was not he who had seduced Miss Farefield from the path of virtue: it was she that seduced him—that he never should have dared to make the slightest overture to *her*, but that every encouragement and provocative had come from herself. Of all this he did not think: he heard the appeal—it murmured in his ears—it thrilled through his brain—it went down into his heart—it excited the most generous feelings of his soul. He looked upon her as if she were a young creature who in all trusting love had surrendered up her honour into his keeping, and to whom he was bound to make every possible atonement. Juliana comprehended full well everything that was passing in his mind: she saw the advantage she had gained;

and her bosom already swelled with the exultation of approaching triumph—for she had rather, much rather, marry this youth who was the object of her passion, now that she knew him to be the son of a wealthy Marquis, than she would wed George Hawkshaw, although the fortune of the latter might be greater than Frank could hope to receive from his sire.

Another moment—and young Paton, forgetting his father, forgetting his mother, forgetting all their counsels—lost in the intoxication of love—entangled in the mass of witcheries and sophistries, blandishments and appeals, which the syren had put in play,—in another moment, we say, he would have yielded—he would have succumbed. His eyes were already bent adoringly upon Juliana—he was drinking deeper and quicker draughts of Lethean bliss from her own warm and glowing regards—his arm was tightening around her—he was on the point of straining her to his breast, and murmuring the affirmative which would have been so delicious to her ears and so fatal to his own happiness,—when all in an instant the sound of a footstep and a loud cough startled them both up from the trance of their feelings.

Rapid as lightning was the look which Juliana flung upon Frank, to bid him summon all his self-possession, as she collected hers; and the next instant she said, as calmly and quietly as if there had been no excitement of feelings—no whirlwind of emotions, "Yes, as you were observing, Mr. Paton, this is indeed a rare collection of plants."

The next moment Mr. Hawkshaw made his appearance from behind the mass of evergreens and exotic verdure. The first thought that flashed to the mind alike of Frank and Juliana, was that he had overheard all: for his countenance looked pale. But this apprehension was cleared up almost as soon as formed, when he said in his usual off-hand open-hearted manner, "Well, you have sought the coolest spot—and really I am not surprised; for those rooms are suffocating."

"I could not endure the heat any longer," said Juliana: "and I requested Mr. Paton to accompany me hither for a few minutes. I felt as if I were about to faint——"

"Indeed! I am truly sorry to hear that," ejaculated the Squire, with a look of concern. "I hope you feel better now?"

"Yes—much, much," responded Juliana. "And now I shall take your arm, Mr. Hawkshaw, and accompany you back into the Saloon. Mr. Paton," she added, turning round and flinging a rapid but significant look upon the youth, "I have not forgotten that you have engaged me to dance again in the third quadrille after the one which is next to take place."

Frank bowed; and Juliana, with a graceful salutation in acknowledgment, took Mr. Hawkshaw's arm.

"You are coming with us—are you not, Paton?" said the Squire: "for as you are comparatively a stranger here, we must not leave you alone."

The youth muttered something, he knew not what; and in a strange state of bewilderment, he followed Mr. Hawkshaw and Juliana out of the conservatory. The terror which at first seized upon him, had left a sort of stupor behind: yet it was only on Juliana's account that he had been thus alarmed—for he still entertained not the remotest suspicion of the attachment subsisting on the Squire's part towards her, or the engagement formed between them. But now that he heard Mr. Hawkshaw conversing with even more than his wonted hilarity with Juliana, as she leant upon his arm, he felt convinced that nothing had been overheard by him: for he remembered how emphatically the Squire had said on the preceding evening, that if he were to meet the lady who had behaved in such a manner to Frank, he could not possibly be civil to her.

As for Juliana herself, she was equally well assured that the Squire had not caught a syllable of what was taking place in the conservatory at the time he entered. She attributed that appearance of pallor on his cheeks to the flickering play of the lights, which were partially agitated by some little currents of air which penetrated through the glass-work in the conservatory. The young lady, though still bent upon her project with regard to Frank, was resolved to retain two strings to her bow even until the very last: so that should one fail, she might adopt the other.

Passing into the Saloon, Mr. Hawkshaw conducted Miss Farefield to the sofa where Lady Saxondale was seated—while Mr. Denison intercepted Frank and conducted him to the refreshment-room: for the worthy host was anxious to pay all possible attention to the son of his old friend the Marquis of Eagledean. On returning to the Saloon, the youth was introduced to a young lady of great beauty, with whom he danced the next quadrille; and for each of the two following, other partners were also provided by Mrs. Denison. Then Frank recollected the hint he had received from Juliana, to the effect that he was to consider himself engaged to her for the dance next ensuing: but for a moment he hesitated whether to attend to it, or not. He had re-awakened from the trance of fascination—he was master of himself once again—he remembered his father's counsel—and his conscience told him that he should be doing wrong if he were to yield to the influence of Juliana's endearments. Still he felt that he could not so far insult her as to take no notice of the hint she had given him; and he resolved that though he would dance with her, he would not again conduct her to the conservatory. Approaching the spot where she and her mother were seated,—Mr. Hawkshaw having in the meantime sought the refreshment-room,—Frank made his bow: Juliana bestowed upon him a sweet smile and a tender glance; and they proceeded to the ball-room together.

"When the quadrille is over," said Juliana, "we will find an opportunity of exchanging a few more words. But be guarded—be cautious!" she immediately added: for as her eyes swept rapidly round the ball-room, she perceived Mr. Hawkshaw amongst the lookers-on at the extremity.

The warning would have been quite unnecessary,—inasmuch as Frank, now having complete control over his feelings and his actions, was resolved to give no encouragement to Juliana, but to show to the utmost of his power that he was proof against all her blandishments and endearments. She herself, throughout this quadrille, was particularly guarded,—the only indication of tenderness which she bestowed, being the pressure of the hand—but not even a significant look, nor a sigh, nor a whis-

per did she vouchsafe. She appeared to converse only with the courteous and easy politeness which a young lady might be expected to observe towards a young gentleman with whom she was but very slightly acquainted. After the quadrille—and while promenading round the room—she bethought herself of a dozen different expedients to obtain five minutes unobserved and unrestrained discourse with Frank: but Mr. Hawkshaw was there—and she dared not risk the danger of exciting his suspicions by accompanying the youth a second time into any secluded place. The moment arrived when he must conduct her back to her seat; and as they were proceeding thither, she hurriedly whispered to him, "If we do not find an opportunity to converse presently, you must meet me to-morrow, soon after mid-day, in the Castle garden, at the same spot where we met yesterday."

Frank made no reply. Indeed, if he had wished to give one, he could not: for by the time Juliana had finished speaking, they were too near the spot where Lady Saxondale was seated for him to do otherwise than make his bow, leave Juliana there, and turn away to another part of the room. Again did Mr. Denison accost him: they joined a group amongst which was Mr. Hawkshaw; and there they stayed conversing for some time. Frank refused to dance any more; and he accordingly remained altogether with his friend the Squire, until supper was announced. Then Hawkshaw proceeded to conduct Juliana to the banquetting-room. Mrs. Denison requested Frank to escort a young lady, to whom she introduced him for the purpose; and when seated at the table, there was a considerable interval between himself and Miss Farefield. We need scarcely observe that the repast was of the most sumptuous description, or that the hospitalities of the host and hostess were administered in the most cordial manner.

After supper the party began to break up: for it was now two in the morning—and in the country, where the guests have frequently long distances to go on their return home, these entertainments are seldom protracted until as late an hour as in the metropolis. Juliana found no opportunity of saying another word to Frank in private upon this occasion—a circumstance at which he was very far from being displeased.

Ere he and Mr. Hawkshaw took their departure, Mr. Denison said to the Squire, "Remember that you and our young friend are to dine with us to-morrow."

CHAPTER CI.

MR. DENISON.

FRANK slept till a very late hour: for he was much wearied with the excitement of feeling as well as with the festivities through which he had passed. Indeed, it was close upon eleven o'clock when he descended to the breakfast-parlour. Mr. Hawkshaw had been for a long ride, and had eaten his first breakfast on his return home: he however sat down to table to commence a second one when Frank made his appearance.

"We are to dine with the Denisons this evening," said the Squire. "Perhaps you would like to write a letter to your father, and inform him that you will not be home for a day or two?"

"I could have wished to return to London to-day," replied Frank; "only that it would be most ungracious not to accept Mr. Denison's very kind invitation."

"Ah! you would like to quit Lincolnshire to-day?" said the Squire: then, with a laugh, he added, "And have you really no inclination to visit Gainsborough and see that lady of whom you spoke to me?"

Frank felt that he was blushing, and scarcely knew what reply to give; but Mr. Hawkshaw seemed so busy with the viands as not to notice his young guest's confusion.

"Why should you think," asked Frank, after a pause, and endeavouring to laugh also, "that I am desirous to see that lady again?"

"Because, my dear Paton," responded the Squire, "it would only be consistent with the weakness of human nature if you did entertain such a desire. Besides, you are so young—so inexperienced——"

"However," interrupted Frank, speaking with the firmness of a fixed resolve, "I have made up my mind that I will *not* see that lady again."

"And you act very wisely," rejoined Hawkshaw. "Now, take my advice, my dear young friend—for so I am sure you will permit me to call you: shun that lady, whoever she may be, as if she were a reptile. I have been thinking very seriously over all you have told me—because the more I see of you, the more I am interested in you; and I should be very sorry to think that you were ensnared or entrapped by such a base, heartless, intriguing creature. I don't know much of the female sex: but this I do know—that such a woman as the one you have described to me, must be capable of any sophistry, hypocrisy, and dissimulation, in order to carry a point. Therefore, if you give me the assurance that you do not intend to use any exertion to see her again, it will be taking a weight off my mind."

"My dear Mr. Hawkshaw, I cannot thank you sufficiently," responded Frank with grateful fervour, "for the kind interest you take in my behalf. I should be unworthy indeed of such a generous friendship, if I did not give you the pledge you ask. And that pledge I do give you, solemnly and sacredly!"

The Squire shook Frank's hand in the most warm-hearted manner: he even wrung it with effusion;—and then he hastened to observe; "The truth is, my young friend, if I thought that you were at all inclined to throw yourself again in the way of that syren, whoever she may be, I should not consider myself justified in keeping you at the Hall another minute. Much as I should regret to lose you so abruptly, it would be my duty to urge your speedy return to London. However, you have given me the pledge—and I am satisfied. I must now inform you that my friend Denison last night took an opportunity of telling me that he received a letter from your father, who is a very old friend of his. Your father, as I already knew from your lips, is preserving an *incognito*,—he enjoined the strictest secrecy to Mr. Denison—and Mr. Denison has not violated it. He did not tell me therefore who your father is; and of course I did not seek to know. Stop! do not tell me that secret, Frank! I would rather not

learn it at present. When you return to London and inform your parents that you have formed the friendship of blunt George Hawkshaw, you can then, with their permission, write and tell me whatsoever you may have to unfold. In the meanwhile you are a welcome guest here; and I hope that the friendship which has thus commenced, will last throughout our lives. And now for the amusements of the day."

"Yesterday, Mr. Hawkshaw," observed Frank, "you denied yourself the pleasure of paying a visit to your intended bride; and from all that I noticed, you did not see her last evening at the ball——"

"Oh, you sly dog!" ejaculated the Squire, with a loud and somewhat boisterous laugh: "you were looking out—were you—to see if I paid particular attention in any quarter?"

"No, Mr. Hawkshaw," was Frank's quick response; "I am incapable of undue curiosity. But what I meant you to infer was, that I did not see you pay any such particular attention: for if you had, I could not have failed to observe it. Taking it for granted, then, that you did *not* see your intended bride last night, I cannot possibly think of being so selfish as to engross you all to myself. Therefore you must pay your accustomed visit—and I shall indulge in a ramble through your beautiful grounds."

"No, my young friend," replied Hawkshaw, smiling: "I do not mean to leave you to yourself, or throw you so completely on your own resources. I have already despatched a note which will leave me free to remain altogether with you. So now, if you please, we will take a scamper and shake off the effects of last night's dissipation."

There was no possibility of offering any farther remonstrance to the good-natured Squire's plan of proceedings; and Frank accordingly suffered him to have his own way. In respect to writing to his father, he said that this would be unnecessary, as he must positively start for London on the ensuing morning. The horses were saddled: he and the Squire rode forth—and several hours were passed in the same manner as on the preceding day. At four o'clock they returned to the Hall to dress for dinner; and a little before five the old-fashioned carriage was in readiness to take them to Mr. Denison's. On arriving there, they received the kindest welcome from their host and hostess, by both of whom Frank was especially made much of. It was a small party, the other guests consisting only of some of Mr. Denison's own family.

In the course of the evening Mr. Denison took an opportunity to conduct Frank into his library; and there, making him sit down, he said, "My young friend, I have to repeat the question I put to you last night: whether there be any way in which I can serve you? You saw the letter which your esteemed father wrote; and you must speak to me with the same confidence as if you were addressing him. Banish all reserve—I am not disposed to be a harsh or severe Mentor——"

Frank felt that it would be most ungracious towards his father's old friend if he did not show him at least the same degree of confidence which he had placed in Mr. Hawkshaw; and he accordingly proceeded to give him precisely the same details as he had already narrated to the Squire, still suppressing Juliana's name, and still making it appear as if the lady of whom he spoke was temporarily residing in the town of Gainsborough. Mr. Denison listened in silent attention: he did not speak a word until Frank had finished; and when the youth had done, he appeared to reflect profoundly for some time.

"Now, my young friend," he at length said, speaking gravely and solemnly, but still with a truly paternal kindness, "you will follow the advice of one who is old enough not merely to be your father, but your grandfather. Avoid this woman as the mariner would a rock on which his vessel must inevitably suffer shipwreck: avoid her as if she were a moral pestilence! You are too young, and your life is too full of brilliant hope, for you to sacrifice yourself to such a shameless profligate. Am I not giving you the advice which your revered father would proffer, were he present on this occasion?"

"You are, my dear sir—you are," respondes Frank, seizing the old gentleman's hand and pressing it warmly. "I have already pledged myself to Mr. Hawkshaw that everything shall be at an end between that lady and myself: I renew the same pledge to you!"

"It is well," rejoined Mr. Denison; "and I am gratified with this evidence of your sincerity. But there is still something more that you must do: and now I am again counselling you as if it were your own father who in his loving care was proffering his best advice. That woman—for it is scarcely possible to call her a lady after all you have told me—will not leave you unmolested: she will take the earliest measures to obtain an interview with you—and for your own sake you ought not to incur the risk of being drawn within the magic circle of her charms. Therefore, my young friend, let me entreat you to take a bold and decisive step, which shall at once put that woman to confusion."

"What would you advise, sir?" asked Frank.

"I would advise that you write a letter, telling her that you have penetrated her character—that you look with loathing and abhorrence upon the woman who could make up her mind to become the wife of an honourable man, merely for the purpose of deceiving him, and using the sanctity of the marriage-state as a cloak for a guilty connexion with a paramour. This would I do, my dear Frank; and in the name of your father I enjoin you to adopt the course which I recommend. There are writing-materials—pen the letter at once—and entrust it to me for delivery."

Frank started, and gazed upon Mr. Denison with a kind of vacant bewilderment. Was he aware, then, who the lady was that formed the subject of conversation? had he seen or heard anything on the previous evening to make him suspect the actual truth? or did he mean to inquire presently the name and address of this lady?

"My young friend," said Mr. Denison, looking grave and serious, "I know more than you have imagined—or perhaps not more than you at this moment suspect. The female who has degraded the sex to which she belongs—who beneath a brilliant exterior nourishes the most detestable passions—and whose beauty serves but as a disguise for her vices—that foul creature is Lady Saxondale's daughter, Juliana Farefield!"

Frank made no immediate observation. He did

not choose to deny an assertion which Mr. Denison had made with the positive manner of one who was neither speaking on conjecture nor at random: and yet, on the other hand, the youth was loath to admit that his secret had been rightly read.

"No matter, my young freind," continued Mr. Denison, "how I have made this discovery: you perceive that I am better informed than perhaps you at first imagined. But the topic is evidently too painful a one to be dwelt upon at unnecessary length. Follow my advice—pen a letter in the sense I have suggested—and leave the rest to me."

The youth felt that Mr. Denison was speaking to him with the same authority with which his own father would have spoken, and with an equal amount of true paternal kindness. He therefore hesitated not to obey the suggestion he had received; and placing himself at the writing-table, he took up a pen. But when he had written the first line he felt totally unable to proceed: his ideas were rapidly falling into confusion—and he was at a loss for the most fitting language wherein to shape the document.

"Suffer me to prompt you as to what you ought to say," observed Mr. Denison: and as Frank acquiesced, the old gentleman proceeded to dictate a letter couched in terms of the most cutting severity.

"Do you not think that this is going somewhat too far?" inquired Frank, presently stopping short.

"Would you use delicate language and mincing phraseology towards a creature of such a stamp?" demanded Mr. Denison with something like sternness in his accents. "Understand me well, Frank—I wish you to write such a letter that Miss Farefield, notwithstanding all her effrontery, will never dare molest you again. Indeed, if she possesses one single spark of pride, she will endeavour to banish you from her thoughts."

"But is this generous," asked Frank, "towards me who has perhaps loved me?"

"Love!" ejaculated Mr. Denison. "Desecrate not the term by using it in such a sense. Is it possible that you can endeavour to blind yourself to the full extent of Juliana's profligacy? No: I think too well of you to entertain such an injurious opinion."

"Proceed, sir—proceed," said Frank: "I am in your hands."

Mr. Denison continued the dictation of the letter; and in a few minutes it was brought to a conclusion.

"Now," he said, as he locked it up in his desk, "we will return to the drawing-room."

"But one word more, my dear sir," said Frank. "Mr. Hawkshaw—is he to be made aware of all this? Does he already know as much as yourself? In a word——"

"Mr. Hawkshaw," interrupted the old gentleman, "will not, I think, speak to you any more upon the subject: and you yourself will scarcely revive it in his presence. To-morrow morning you are to start for London: and much as it would please me to see more of you on the present occasion of your visit into Lincolnshire, I cannot, in justice to your own interests and to my friendship for your father, counsel you to prolong your stay."

Mr. Denison and Frank now retraced their way to the drawing-room, where coffee was served up. An hour was then passed in agreeable conversation upon various topics; and soon after ten o'clock the Squire's carriage was announced to be in readiness. Having taken leave of the kind-hearted Denisons, Frank accompanied Mr. Hawkshaw back to the Hall; and on the following morning he took his departure for London. But he did not separate from the Squire without expressing his fervid gratitude for the hospitality he had received,—coupled with the assurance that he should write to him with the briefest possible delay.

But in the meanwhile, what were Juliana's thoughts and feelings in respect to Francis Paton? It will be remembered that the last words she had spoken to him on the night of the ball, consisted of a hurriedly whispered entreaty that he would meet her in the castle-grounds on the ensuing day. Shortly after breakfast one of Mr. Hawkshaw's servants arrived at the castle, with a note from his master, addressed to the Hon. Miss Farefield. It was couched in affectionate terms, and besought her to excuse him from paying his wonted visit that day, as his young guest had claims upon him which, in the true spirit of hospitality, could not be violated. Juliana, on the receipt of this note, foresaw that Frank would not be enabled to keep the appointment she had given him. If the Squire remained in constant companionship with him, he could not possibly find an opportunity to come such a distance as that between the Hall and the Castle. Juliana was profoundly vexed and annoyed at this disappointment: but she nevertheless went to stroll in the gardens at about mid-day with the faint hope that Frank might yet possibly come to her. The time passed—and still he appeared not. The day went by; and not the slightest attempt was made on his part to obtain an interview with her. She thought to herself that on the morrow he would be sure to come: for she argued that Mr. Hawkshaw must surely have some business to attend to, of some kind or another, that would leave Frank his own master for a few hours. Not for an instant did she suspect that anything prejudicial to her schemes was taking place: nor did she apprehend that after all that had occurred between herself and the youth at the Denisons', he would be in a hurry to leave Lincolnshire.

This was the second day after the ball: it was the one on which Frank had departed in the morning. The hour of noon came—and Juliana again walked alone in the garden. She kept near the spot where Frank had so suddenly appeared in her presence three days back: and wistfully did she gaze through the foliage in the direction by which she thought he would come. But he came not. Presently she heard footsteps approaching along the gravel-walk behind: those footsteps were at once recognised—she knew them to be Mr. Hawkshaw's. Having, as the reader is aware, made up her mind to keep the two strings to her bow, she suddenly put on her brightest looks, and sped to meet the Squire with every appearance of affectionate delight.

"Well, Juliana," he said, after the wonted embrace, "I suppose you did not think to receive another note of excuse from me to-day?"

"Certainly not," she replied: "it would have been too unkind—almost unpardonable:"—and she bent upon him a look in which love's beams appeared to kindle. "I know very well that a guest has claims upon one: but still one must not forget the claims of others—at least not altogether."

"Rest assured, Juliana," rejoined Hawkshaw, "that even if Mr. Paton *had* remained at the Hall to-day, I should have flitted away from him for an hour or two to visit the Castle."

"Ah! then your young friend is gone?" said Juliana, scarcely able to conceal her mingled astonishment and vexation at this announcement; but the next moment it occurred to her that Frank, though having quitted the Hall, had probably remained in the neighbourhood in a secret manner, as the only means of being enabled to find an opportunity of obtaining an interview with her.

"Yes," observed Mr. Hawkshaw, carelessly; "he has returned to London. My own lumbering carriage took him as far as Lincoln—and he is now no doubt journeying rapidly homeward."

"You soon lost him," said Juliana, not knowing indeed exactly what she did say; for the hope which she had formed, suddenly died within her—and she could scarcely doubt any longer that Frank had really left Lincolnshire.

"Yes—he was anxious to get back to his parents. And natural enough—as he has only so recently discovered them. By the bye, dear Juliana, you have not told me yet what you think of him? Is he not a very nice young man?"

"Oh! he is a mere boy—almost a child."

"Well, call him a boy, if you like," responded the Squire, laughing. "Do you consider him a nice boy?"

"My acquaintance with him was so short: I merely danced with him twice, you know."

"True! But one soon forms an opinion of persons. For my part, I like him exceedingly: he is an amiable and generous-hearted youth—much inexperienced in the world, however."

"Necessarily so," observed Juliana: "because he is so young."

"Last evening we dined at the Denisons'."

"Ah! and Mr. Paton was with you, then? I am sure that if he had remained any longer in Lincolnshire, my mother would have been delighted to have shown him every attention as a friend of your's—because you know, my dear George, that every friend of *your's* will always be welcome at Saxondale Castle."

"Thank you for this assurance, my dear Juliana. And now," continued the Squire, assuming a more serious tone, "I am going to ask you a very singular question: but I will soon explain my motive."

"Indeed! a singular question?"—and a queer feeling that bordered upon alarm, though she scarcely knew why, flitted across her brain: so true is it that a guilty conscience is ever a fertile source of apprehension.

"Yes—it may seem singular—but I hope not impertinent:"—and the Squire appeared to hesitate.

"How strangely you are talking, George!" cried Juliana, fixing upon him a keen penetrating look: but she read nothing in the honest open-hearted countenance of Mr. Hawkshaw to warrant her apprehensions.

"Well then," he continued, "I will come to the point. Are you aware, Juliana, whether the day for her ladyship's nuptials with Lord Harold Staunton is fixed? or what arrangements her ladyship proposes to make with regard to the ceremony?"

"I have not yet heard. My mother is somewhat reserved towards me upon those matters:"—and Juliana experienced a great relief when she thus discovered what the topic was that Mr. Hawkshaw had prefaced with a somewhat alarming degree of mystery. "The truth is," she added, in a confidential tone, "my mother perhaps feels that she is about to take a step that the world may consider ridiculous or impolitic—marrying a man so much younger than herself——"

"Oh! but if people consult their own happiness," exclaimed Mr. Hawkshaw, "they may defy the opinion of the world."

"And yet you, my dear George, shrink somewhat from announcing to your acquaintances our engagement? But perhaps," added Juliana, as if quite in a careless manner, "you have mentioned it to one or two? I dare say, if the truth be known, you told it to Mr. Paton——"

"No: on my honour I did not!" responded the Squire emphatically. "Did not you yourself the other night counsel me at the ball not to make it the subject of any confidential communication?"

"Yes—I recollect. But wherefore did you ask me just now those questions concerning my mother?"—and again did Juliana gaze penetratingly though furtively upon the Squire's countenance.

"I was only thinking that since I have received your assent to the proposal which I was venturous enough to make you, my dear Juliana, I might next solicit you to fix the day which is to render me so happy—Oh! so happy—I cannot find words to express my feelings! But in proffering such a request, it occurred to me that much might depend on Lady Saxondale's own arrangements. Probably it would be suitable for the two marriages to take place at the same time—unless her ladyship be desirous that her own nuptials should be celebrated first. Tell me, Juliana—am I too bold—am I too presumptuous—in expressing a hope that you will not long delay the period which is to render me so happy?"

"I will speak to my mother to-day," answered Juliana, affecting to bend down her eyes in confusion: but at the moment the thought which was uppermost in her mind, was the necessity of communing seriously with herself, in order to arrive at a positive decision how she intended to act.

"Do—I beseech you—speak to her ladyship to-day," urged Mr. Hawkshaw.

"But our engagement has been so short," murmured Juliana. "It is but three days since you honoured me with the offer of your hand——"

"True, dearest Juliana: but are we not old acquaintances? have we not known each other for years? Pardon me for being thus urgent! The world need not know how long or how short our engagement may have been. Come, Juliana—let me not hear any scruples from those sweet lips of your's. Recall not your promise that you will speak to your mother this afternoon! Wherefore should the happy day be unnecessarily postponed? Convinced as I am of the sincerity of your affection fo me—and judging the extent of it by my own—— But am I in error, Juliana, to speak thus trustfully—thus hopefully?"

"Oh! how can you question me thus? do you doubt my love?"—and the artful young lady gazed up with every appearance of earnest tenderness into the Squire's countenance.

"No, no, Juliana—not for a moment do I doubt your love: and therefore you will not unnecessarily postpone the day of our nuptials. This is the hour when your mother is least likely to be engaged. Go and seek her at once. I have business that calls me to Gainsborough; and therefore I shall take my departure. To-morrow, when I call, may I hope, Juliana, that I shall receive from your lips——"

"I understand you, my dearest George," responded Juliana, murmuringly. "Since you wish it, the day shall be fixed."

"Then farewell for the present—farewell, dearest Juliana!"

Having embraced the young lady, the Squire sped to the stables, where his horse had been put up without the saddle or bridle being taken off; and mounting the splendid animal, he rode away from Saxondale Castle.

Juliana, instead of hastening to seek her mother, continued to walk in the garden. She not only felt the necessity, as already stated, of pondering seriously upon the course which she ought to pursue: but she thought it still just possible that Frank might have remained in Lincolnshire. Perhaps she might see him presently? perhaps it was after all only a stratagem on his part to escape from Hawkshaw Hall? and perhaps he had accepted the Squire's offer to use the carriage as far as Lincoln in order to lull that gentleman into the belief that he was really serious in speeding back to London? But if Frank should *not* come, what was Juliana to do? Oh! if he had deserted her—if he had abandoned her—should she endeavour to hate him as much as now she loved him? and should she marry Mr. Hawkshaw with the least possible delay?

Hour after hour passed; and still was Miss Farefield walking in the garden. Frank made not his appearance: the faint hope which had still lingered in her heart, waned away; and at length it died within her. It was now close upon five o'clock; and if he had stayed in Lincolnshire, he would have seen her by this time. Her pride was hurt—her feelings were wounded in their utmost sensitiveness. Nevertheless, she did not hate the youth: it was easier to think of hating him than to bring her mind to that point. The passion she had experienced for him was still too absorbing—too engrossing, to permit such a sudden change of sentiment. But what step could she take to communicate with him? She knew not where he dwelt in London: she knew not who his recently discovered parents were. Besides, even if she were well acquainted on these heads, there was no time: for Mr. Hawkshaw was now pressing that the nuptial day should be named.

Suddenly an idea struck Juliana. She *might* name the day to accompany Mr. Hawkshaw to the altar—she might postpone it for a month; and in the meantime she could adopt some course in order to communicate with Frank. She herself could not proceed to London on any pretence; because Lady Saxondale would not accompany her, and it would be exposing her mother to scandalous surmises—indeed, to the downright loss of reputation—to leave her alone at the Castle with Lord Harold Staunton. Therefore Juliana must make up her mind to remain likewise at the Castle; and whatever course she adopted in respect to Frank, must be pursued by means of correspondence. But how to discover his address? That was the question. Perhaps he would write? perhaps he had been recalled to London by a sudden communication from his father? perhaps he himself was at that very moment suffering much affliction on her account? For she could scarcely conceive that after what had taken place between them in the conservatory, he had suddenly surrendered her altogether. Was he not about to yield to her arguments and her entreaties at the moment when Mr. Hawkshaw made his appearance in the conservatory? were not his lips about to breathe the word which was to crown her triumph? Surely, then, he had not the power to shake off the influence of her spells within so brief an interval, and in so abrupt a manner? Juliana still loved him—still longed for him—still craved to have that beautiful youth entirely to herself; and she was not the woman likely to abandon a hope that was cherished or a project that was formed.

In the course of the evening she spoke to her mother upon the subject which Mr. Hawkshaw had named to her. Lady Saxondale reflected for some minutes; and then answered in the following manner:—

"It is quite certain, Juliana, that your marriage with Mr. Hawkshaw cannot take place *first*: because it would be impossible for you to leave me alone at the Castle with Lord Harold. Already perhaps there is some little indiscretion in his remaining here after the departure of his aunt and sister: but still it would be over-scrupulous and punctilious for any one to affirm that a lady with a grown-up daughter and a host of domestics at her residence, may not have a male guest staying with her—especially when he is about to become her husband. Thus far therefore we may conclude that no harm is done. But it would be monstrously indiscreet for me to remain with him here alone. Therefore your marriage cannot take place first. Nor can our's: because, as we must proceed somewhere to pass the honeymoon——" and Lady Saxondale could not help smiling bitterly as she thus spoke——"you on your side would have to remain here alone at the Castle. That also would be imprudent, with a suitor visiting you. Therefore, all things considered, the two marriages had better take place at the same time. One fortnight hence do I purpose to bestow my hand on Lord Harold Staunton."

"One fortnight?" ejaculated Juliana. "The time is brief, mother."

"I do not choose to prolong it," was Lady Saxondale's answer.

"Ah! I understand!" said the daughter maliciously: "you are in a hurry to obtain the name of a wife with the least possible delay, so that in case of an accident, you may not have that of a mother again too soon?"

Lady Saxondale became scarlet, and sprang to her feet from the chair on which she was sitting: then, with a withering look, she said in a tone hoarse with rage, "Take care, Juliana, that *you* don't become a parent too soon to be agreeable to Mr. Hawkshaw."

With these words her ladyship quitted the room; and proceeding to another, threw herself on a chair and wept in very spite and rage. Yes: the proud and haughty Lady Saxondale—the strong-minded woman,—gave vent to her wrath in tears,—tears which she could not possibly restrain! How she hated Juliana at that moment!—hated her far more intensely than during the time of those scenes which were wont to take place between them at Saxondale House previous to the visit to Lincolnshire!—hated her indeed with a malignity that seemed to crave for a bitter vengeance! For some time past there had been no angry words nor expression of ill-feeling between the mother and daughter: but now that ill-feeling was all revived again—and Lady Saxondale wept because her rage was so impotent.

She leant forward; and resting her elbows upon a table, buried her face in her hands, actually groaning in spirit. Oh! if she could but fly to some far-off clime, away from the theatre of her machinations and intrigues—away also from a land where there were those pitfalls which she herself had digged with her own hands, and into any one of which a single false step would precipitate her ——But no: it was impossible!—she must remain in England to carry out her views—to accomplish her destiny. The door opened; and Lord Harold Staunton entered the room. Lady Saxondale did not immediately perceive him: he advanced straight up to the chair in which she was seated—and with a kind of angry impatience, said, "Well, what is the meaning of those tears?"

Still Lady Saxondale continued unaware of his presence: she was so profoundly absorbed in her own distressing thoughts, that though he had spoken loud enough, she actually did not hear him.

"What is it, I say? what is the matter with you now?" he demanded. "A pretty prospect for our married life!" he added bitterly: and then Lady Saxondale looked round.

Quickly wiping away her tears, and composing her features with a remarkable suddenness, she said in a cold tone, "How long have you been standing there?"

"But a few moments. Perhaps you were talking aloud ere I entered the room, and were saying things that you would rather should not meet my ears?"

"No: I am not aware that I was musing aloud. But surely, Harold," she continued, with accents of cold irony, "you do *not* expect our marriage state to be characterized by happiness?"

"Happiness—no!" exclaimed the young nobleman bitterly; and a ghastly expression of anguish swept over his countenance. "Happiness indeed! what happiness can there be for either of us again in this life? Would to God that I had never known you! would to heaven that I could recall the past! I was a rake—a spendthrift—a good-for-nothing extravagant fellow, a short time back; and yet I was happy. But from that fatal moment when *you* cast your spells around me, my peace of mind has been destroyed—never to be given back again!"

"And pray, my lord," inquired Lady Saxondale, fixing upon him a cold reptile-like look, "in what strange mood is it that you have sought me now for the purpose of telling me all these things? It is literally childish to pretend for a moment that I had the power to persuade you to do certain deeds, unless the readiness and the inclination were already in you."

"Silence, woman!" ejaculated Staunton: "you are a fiend in the most glorious guise! I have been enamoured of your beauty—it still dazzles me—and there are even moments when it enchants me: but nevertheless I loathe and abominate your character. What have I become? Dare I look inward? No, no! Dare I even look the world in the face? Scarcely!—for in every one I meet, methinks I behold an accuser."

"Harold, for heaven's sake hush these wild words!" said her ladyship, now becoming really frightened. "You know not who may overhear them—the walls have ears——"

"But tell me, tell me, Harriet—I command and conjure you," interrupted the young man, speaking like one distracted: "is the secret positively safe? does not Juliana suspect it? Why does she look at me so singularly at times, and with a certain malice in her regards? Ah! methinks that there are moments when she also has that wicked look which I have sometimes caught upon your countenance,—not the wicked look of sensuality,—but a look that seems to be the reflection of a soul capable of any mischief—a look as if a devil were gazing out of your eyes."

"You are mad, Harold, to talk in this strain," interjected the lady vehemently. "The reason why Juliana sometimes regards you in a strange manner, is because she has fathomed our intimacy. Perhaps she may have watched when you have sought my chamber at night——But it is of no consequence how she has made the discovery: suffice it for me to inform you that it *is* made; and if when you entered the room ere now, you beheld me weeping, it was with rage and fury because Juliana had given me to understand a few minutes before, that our amour was known to her."

"Then you assure me that the *other* secret is safe?" said Harold, experiencing some slight feeling of relief. "But you do not know," he continued, in a vacant and abstracted manner, "why I could not accompany you to the ball at the Denisons' the night before last. It was because I liked not to meet that man Hawkshaw."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, with a look of unfeigned surprise. "And wherefore should you have liked not to meet him? how has he offended you? Methought you were excellent friends."

"Friends! Yes—good friends enough—there is no reason we should be otherwise. And yet," proceeded Harold, still in a nervous and abstracted manner, "I have been haunted by a strange presentiment with regard to that man. The other day—it was the one before that on which the ball took place—he paid but a hurried visit to the Castle, if you remember. In short, it was the day he proposed to Juliana, as you told me. Well, he came up to my room to bid me good bye—he saw my pistol-case——"

"Enough, Harold—enough!" interrupted Lady Saxondale, flinging around her frightened glances: then, approaching her countenance close to that of the young nobleman, she said in a low hoarse voice, "Fool that you are to continue talking in this strain! If ruin overtakes you——us——it will be your fault!"

"Heaven forbid!" groaned the wretched Harold: and he shuddered visibly from head to foot. "But I *must* tell you about Hawkshaw's visit to my room ——Why has he kept away so much for the last two or three days—indeed, ever since *that* day?" demanded Staunton abruptly. "There is something ominous in it!"

"Nothing of the kind," answered Lady Saxondale: then with a tone and look which savoured somewhat of contempt, she said, "Are you a man thus to conjure up images of terror to haunt yourself withal? Hawkshaw has been here to-day—he is the same as ever—he has pressed Juliana to name a time for their nuptials. They will take place the same day as our own—a fortnight hence. Mr. Hawkshaw did not call for two days because he had a friend staying with him. And now, Harold, you must exert more courage——"

"Courage!" he ejaculated: "it is an almost superhuman courage that I am constantly exerting to put on the outward appearance of composure. But it does not always serve me! The other day—when Hawkshaw spoke of the missing pistol—I felt that I grew white as a sheet—that all the blood had suddenly stagnated in my veins——Ah! it was a hideous, a horrible feeling that seized upon me at that moment! Harriet, but a short time back, when I was a gay rollicking fellow about town, I laughed at the idea of conscience: I believed not that there was one within me. But now I know that there *is*—and a conscience, too, capable of inflicting the stripes of a scorpion-scourge! Oh! there are moments when I feel as if I should go mad! I have become a being of strange contradictions—tossing hither and thither upon the wildest and most tumultuous sea. Sometimes I adore your beauty—I feel that no sacrifice was too great to possess you: at other times I hate and abhor you with the strongest loathing——"

"At all events you do not disguise the truth,"

observed her ladyship, with some degree of bitterness. "But listen, Harold. Is it I who are forcing you to become my husband? is it not you that are forcing yourself as a husband upon me?"

"Yes!" he ejaculated, suddenly grasping her robust but splendidly modelled arm with such violence that his fingers closed around it as if they were an iron vice: "I *do* force myself upon you as a husband;—and beware how you attempt to deceive me! beware how you endeavour to thwart me! What? all these crimes to go unrewarded! No, by heaven! if I have waded through the Red Sea—a sea of blood—it was for the purpose of gaining the land of promise! I longed to possess you: I succeeded. I longed for an established social position; and I must obtain it. Now do you understand me?"

"I have understood you all along," answered Lady Saxondale; "and I tell you, Harold, that if you will only exercise proper caution—if you will summon all your courage to your aid, so as to meet valiantly and even defiantly these regrets and remorses which have crept upon you—and if in future you will avoid giving utterance to your feelings, even when you believe yourself to be unheard and unseen—I will do *my* best to soothe you! You tell me that I am handsome: I will use all my blandishments to make you happy. Only you *must* exercise caution: for an unguarded look—a single word let drop—may bring the thunderbolt of ruin upon the heads of us both."

"Yes—there is reason in your words," said Harold, slowly and thoughtfully: "and I must endeavour to exercise a greater mastery over myself:"—but as he thus spoke, an expression of bitter anguish again swept across his countenance.

CHAPTER CII.

THE TWENTY-FIRST OF AUGUST.

It was the 21st of August, and the clock in Solomon Patch's boozing-ken was striking seven, as Madge Somers entered the place. The very instant she crossed the threshold, it struck her that the old man and his wife suddenly exchanged singular and even sinister looks as they caught sight of her: but as they both alike addressed her the next moment with their accustomed friendliness of manner, she fancied that she must have been mistaken. Passing round into the bar-parlour, she beckoned Solomon to follow her; and when they were alone together, she said, looking very hard at him, "Is anything wrong?"

"Wrong? no! What made you think so?" he at once exclaimed.

"Only because it occurred to me that you and your wife exchanged rapid looks of meaning as I entered the place."

"Ah! it was because we'd been a wondering whether you would come or not—and whether you was really serious in expecting to get that information as you wanted."

"Serious?" observed Madge: "and how could you think I was otherwise? Did I not leave fifty pounds in your hands? and did not that prove that I was serious enough?"

"To be sure, to be sure!" responded the old man. "The fifty pounds is all right, and is forthcoming."

"If I had not been able to put confidence in you," rejoined Madge, "I should not have trusted you with the money. And now tell me—have you heard any one talking about the business? and do you think that there will be a claimant for the fifty pounds?"

"I ain't heerd say nothing partickler about it," answered Solomon: "on'y I know that Tony Wilkins and some others has been on the look-out—but whether they've learnt anything or no, I hav'n't heard tell. Howsumever, they hav'n't forgot that this is the evening you was to be here; and me and my wife had just been saying we wondered as how whether you would come, when the door opened and you made your appearance. That's why we looked at each other as you saw us do."

"Well, and about another matter," observed Madge. "I have not been able to come here since that night——you know what night I mean——"

"To be sure—the Cannibal's affair:"—and old Solomon placed his finger in a sly manner against the side of his nose. "I raythor thought you might be keeping out of the way on purpose——"

"Not I indeed! What was there to keep out of the way for? I have been engaged I may say day and night in this same search on which I have set others—and all in vain on my part! But have you had the curiosity to peep down the well again? or have you been prudent enough to have the stones cemented over, and the trap-door above nailed up? In short, have you had carpenters and bricklayers to put your house to rights again?"

"Yes—completely," responded Patch. "It's pretty well the same as it was afore."

"And have there been many inquiries after Chiffin?" was Madge Somers' next question. "But no doubt there have. What have you said in answer to them?"

"Oh! not much. He hasn't been missing long enough for people to begin to wonder. It is but a week since the thing took place. But what will you have—brandy, beer, or wine?"

"Some beer and some cold meat—nothing else. I shall remain till eight o'clock; and then I must be off, whether I get the information or not. I have an appointment to keep at nine on the other side of the Regent's Park,—and it will take me an hour to get there."

Solomon Patch went forth into the bar to draw some porter for Madge's behoof—while his wife, to whom he mentioned her wishes, proceeded to serve her with the supper she had ordered; and again did the two old people exchange significant looks. But this time Madge, who was in the parlour behind the bar, observed them not.

She ate and drank; and by the time her repast was over, it was half-past seven o'clock. She looked very much annoyed, and gave utterance to several ejaculations of impatience: for she began to fear that the reward she had offered would find no claimant on the part of any one giving her the information she required. Ten minutes more passed away—it was now twenty minutes to eight; and she was just thinking to herself that her hope was certain to be disappointed—when Solomon Patch suddenly entered from the bar, where he had been

serving liquor; and the woman at once saw by his look that he had something to communicate.

"Here's a cove as wants you, Madge," he said; "and though he hasn't told me, I think it must be for the business you're come about. And he's got some one with him."

"Who is it?" demanded Madge impatiently.

"Here's the genelman to speak for his-self," answered the landlord: and the next moment Bob Shakerly entered the bar-parlour.

He was followed by a man of even a greater age than his own, and who was well clad, having altogether a most respectable appearance. Madge started up from her seat; and gazing upon this person in a scrutinising manner, seemed to be considering whether his features were at all familiar to her. But they were not.

"Sit down, my friend," said old Bob Shakerly to the individual whom he had thus brought with him; "and don't speak a word till I tell you. Now, Madge," he continued, addressing himself to the woman, "is it all right about the blunt?"

"Are you prepared to claim it?" she inquired, again looking at the stranger, as if more than half-suspecting who he would prove to be.

"I am," rejoined Shakerly. "Come, Solomon, produce the bank-notes—and then I'll out with what I have to say."

"Is it to be so?" asked the landlord, appealing to Madge.

"Shakerly," she at once said, "I have no time to lose. Is this Mr. Thompson that you have brought with you?"

"It is," was the answer given by the old knacker.

"One word—and only one word, said Madge; "so that I may assure myself that this is no trick on your part, Shakerly, to get possession of the money."

"Rest assured, my good woman, whoever you are," said Mr. Thompson, now breaking the silence which he had hitherto maintained; "that I would not become a party to any fraud or dishonesty. I do not even know what all this means."

"Just one word in your ear, Mr. Thompson," exclaimed Madge; "and then I shall know at once that it is all right."

"Well, only one word," interposed Bob Shakerly: "for you can't have your information, whatever it is you want, before the blunt is safe in my pocket."

"Your friend Solomon Patch has got it," rejoined the woman; "and therefore you can have no fear of receiving it. Mr. Thompson, a single word in your ear:"—and bending down so that her repulsive countenance well nigh came in complete contact with his venerable though care-worn one, she said in a low whispering tone, "If you were once the manager of a company of players, can you recollect the name of a man and his wife, having two children, who were in your troop, and concerning whom you are acquainted with some particular secret?"

"Ah! I know whom you mean—it strikes me at once!" answered Thompson, speaking louder than Madge herself had done.

"Hush!" she immediately interjected. "Whisper the name in my ear."

"Deveril," he replied, uttering the word in a subdued voice according to the intimation he had just received.

"Enough," said Madge, with an air of satisfaction: then turning to Solomon Patch, she added, "You can pay your friend Shakerly the money. Now go out into the bar together, and drink a bottle of wine at my expense. I must have ten minutes' conversation with Mr. Thompson here."

The old landlord and Bob Shakerly accordingly went forth from the bar-parlour, closing the door behind them. The former speedily produced the bottle wherewith the woman had bade them regale themselves; and he invited Shakerly to follow him into the tap-room, where they could drink it together at their ease, and in the companionship of a pipe. But old Solomon Patch did not instantaneously light his pipe, nor begin drinking his share of the wine. He took out a letter from his waistcoat-pocket, tore off the blank half of the sheet, and hastily wrote the following lines thereon:—

"maj be hear. shee comed punktal 2 the time. she should say as how she have gott a pointmint at nine t'other side of regency park. i raythor wonderd u didn't as how cum but spose you thort itt best to kepe out of the way til u heerd what dodge she was up 2. so as i prommessed i've sent thes fu lines to lett u no."

Having completed this precious scrawl, Bob Shakerly folded it up in such a manner that its contents might not be read by the messenger to whom he purposed to entrust it; and then he carefully sealed it, stamping the wax with a farthing which he took from his pocket. This being done, he glanced round the room, where about a dozen persons were assembled; and singling out Tony Wilkins, beckoned this individual into a corner.

"So you hav'n't got the fifty-pound prise, young chap?" he said in a whisper.

"I've tried hard for it, though," was the response; "but you might as well look for a needle in a bottle of hay, as arter that feller Thompson with such a precious little information as Madge could give about him. I suppose she's here—bain't she?"

"Yes—but no matter. If you hav'n't got the fifty pounds, I'll give you half-a-guinea to make you some amends. But you must out off at once with this here note; and mind and don't show it to nobody. You can guess who it's meant for—cos there's no address on the kiver."

"Enough—I understand," responded Wilkins, and taking the note he put it into his waistcoat-pocket: then having received the promised reward, he sped away to execute the commission entrusted to him.

Solomon Patch, having thus sent off his emissary, seated himself next to old Bob Shakerly; and while helping himself to wine,—and a precious compound Solomon's wine was too,—he said to his companion, "How come you to be so fortunate as to light upon this chap Thompson and get the fifty pounds?"

"It was all a accident," responded the knacker: "and when I got up this morning, I no more thought of the bit of luck that was going to tumble in my way, than that you was a likely chap to make me a present of a hundred pound yourself."

"Well, I don't think I be very likely to do that," observed Solomon, with a humorous grin. "But how came this luck to happen?"

"In the first place, old friend," answered Shakerly, "you must remember that I was up here at the *Goat*, smoking my bakker, ten days or so back, when Madge Somers come in and told all the folks

what she wanted done, and put the fifty pounds into your hand. Well, I went away, thinking little of it: for I wasn't going to waste my time in looking arter chaps of the name of Thompson—it was more to my account to chop up horse-flesh to supply them nice sassages which the pastry-cooks puts in their rolls. But to come to the pint. Last night a pal of mine told me as how he and another chap was going to do a bit of resurrection-business, and wanted to know whether I would dispose of the stiff 'un for them among my connexion. Well, you're aweer, Sol, I don't do much in that there line now: but when a job does tumble in my way, I don't mind turning a honest penny or so by undertaking it. Well, I promised I would make the inquiry. So this evening—a little arter five o'clock—I dresses myself up in my best clothes, as you sees me now—and I toddles up to the West End of the town, to call on a certain Dr. Ferney, a gentleman which patronises the harts and sciences—more partickly the noble hart of body-snatching—which was the way I first come to know him. Lord bless you! I've knowed Dr. Ferney a long while——"

"No doubt, Bob. But don't spin your story out so," interrupted Solomon. "Well, you goes up to this Dr. Ferney——eh?"

"I does. He hangs out in Conduit Street, 'Anover Square," continued the old resurrectionist. "Of course I goes round to the back-entrance; and I'm showed into a back parlour on the ground-floor, where a respectable old gentleman was reading a book. The doctor wasn't there at the time; and it was the fault of the servant that I was showed into that room. Well, presently in comes the doctor his-self; and the moment he sees me, he knows my business is particklar; so he says to this venerable-looking old file, 'Mr. Thompson,' says he, 'just have the kindness to leave us alone together for a few minutes.'—Thompson indeed! At that there name I all in a moment recollects what Madge Somers had said: but then the thought struck me that there was a many Thompsons in the world, and I'd no call to be supparised at meeting with one on 'em now and then. Still I don't know what it was—curiosity perhaps—but at all events, summut—that made me say to that old gentleman, 'Beg pardon, sir, for the impertinence; but you don't happen once to have been the manager to a troop of players?'—Mr. Thompson, who was just going to leave the room, turned round short, looked at me uncommon hard, and then said, 'I don't know who you are: but you evidently appear to know me. I *was* once—and indeed for a very long time—in the position you have mentioned.'—Now, Sol, my limbs isn't very active: on the contrairy, they're rayther shaky: but I cut a double caper on hearing them words, for I felt that Madge's fifty pounds was as good as in my pocket. So I begged Mr. Thompson not to leave the room for a minute or two: and then I told him there was a woman who was uncommon anxious to see him, and who was looking for him all over the world. He of course axed me what the woman wanted, and all about it: but I couldn't tell him nothing, for I didn't know nothing myself: but I said it was very important, and I thought was summut to his own advantage. I'd often seen that bit of gammon stuck in newspaper advertisements; and I thought it would make him all the more ready to come along with me. Well, I raised his curiosity and after a consultation with Dr. Ferney, Mr. Thompson agreed to accompany me. So while he went up-stairs to put on his shoes and coat—for it seems that he is living in the house, and had on slippers and a dressing-gown at the time—I axed the Doctor if he would like to have the stiff 'un; but the Doctor rayther declined, as he didn't much like summut that happened about the last one he had of me. That was a woman named Mabel Stewart——"

"Well, never mind who it was, Bob," interrupted Solomon. "Mr. Thompson agreed to accompany you, you was a-saying."

"Yes: but when I brought him up into this part of the town, he didn't very much like it. Howsumever, I got him into the place: and what's more, I have sacked the reward. Now, I mean to say there's many a chap which writes romances that hav'n't never hit on a more singular coincidence"——with a strong emphasis on the *i*——"than this here."

"Very true, Bob," rejoined the landlord, refilling the glasses. "But I say, hav'n't you an idea of what it is that Madge wants with this Mr. Thompson? I wouldn't mind giving summut to know: for depend upon it there's money to be turned by it—or else Madge Somers wouldn't be giving herself all this trouble and shelling out her blunt into the bargain. I 'spose Thompson his-self had some suspicion of what was wanted of him; and of course you pumped him as you come along together?"

"There was nothing to pump," answered old Shakerly. "Thompson had no more idea what Madge Somers wanted with him, than the man in the moon. Quite t'otherwise: he seemed to think that I *must* know summut of the business, and that it was rayther odd I wouldn't tell him: but he talked the best part of the time in praise of Dr. Ferney, who, it seems, has been an uncommon good friend to him. In fact, Thompson said that if it hadn't been for the doctor he should have perished. What he meant, I don't exactly know——But I say, if you are so anxious to find out what Madge wants with him, why don't you go and listen a bit?"

"It's too late now," answered Solomon. "Depend upon it their conversation is precious near over: for Madge has got an appointment to keep at nine t'other side of Regency Park. It's now past eight, and she'll be going in a few minutes."

At this moment the potboy entered the room, and said in a low voice to Solomon Patch, "Madge Somers is gone; and that there gentleman which is in the bar, wants me to show him the way to the nearest cab-stand: for he's quite a stranger in these parts."

"I'll go and speak to him," answered Solomon: and leaving old Bob Shakerly to finish the wine, he issued from the public room.

Mr. Thompson had in the meanwhile emerged from the bar-parlour, and was now standing near the door of the boosing-ken, waiting for the potboy to conduct him out of the maze of Agar Town. Solomon—putting on his hat—volunteered, with his wonted hypocritical civility to serve as the old gentleman's guide to the cab-stand at King's Cross. As they proceeded thither, Solomon did his best to extract from his companion the nature of the business for which Madge Somers had so anxiously sought him: but Thompson, plainly discerning the land-

lord's object, dexterously evaded the questions thus put; and Mr. Paten returned to his establishment no wiser in that respect than when he had issued forth.

CHAPTER CIII.

THE VILLA.

It was not forgotten at William Deveril's abode that this was the evening on which that strange woman whom he had rescued from the Trent, and who in her turn had saved his life and that of the Marquis at the boozing-ken, was to pay him a visit. Lord Eagledean dined with William and Angela on the present occasion; and as the young maiden was no stranger to her brother's affairs, she speculated with as much anxiety and interest as William and the Marquis themselves, as to what would be the result of the interview that was expected.

They were all three seated in that same front parlour on the ground-floor which has been alluded to in a previous chapter. The evening was exceedingly sultry; and the casement, which reached down to the floor, stood partially open: but the curtains were drawn over it inside; and the lamp was burning upon the table.

"We have been speaking," said the Marquis, after a brief pause in the conversation, "altogether of the expected visit, to the exclusion of other topics: but two or three times I was on the point of observing that with regard to our adventure of the other night——"

"Ah, that dreadful night!" murmured Angela, with a shudder: "what a providential escape! I had a presentiment of evil—I dreaded lest some treachery should be intended——"

"And yet who could have foreseen it?" said the Marquis. "But I was about to observe that the longer and the oftener I reflect upon the incident of that night, the more I am convinced that the wretched woman who had already sought to work you so serious an injury, William, was the instigatrix of that stupendous treachery."

"Lady Saxondale!" said our young hero. "Yes, my lord, circumstances do indeed too plainly point to her as the employer of that dreadful man who so righteously met his doom—fearful though it were!"

"It *could* have been none other than Lady Saxondale," observed the Marquis. "Who else could be interested in getting rid of both of us at the same moment? And then too, we had previously received proofs that she was in correspondence with that man. Moreover, his employer must have been some one whose proffered bribe far outweighed whatsoever amount of money the miscreant might have hoped to get from us. Yes, Lady Saxondale—and Lady Saxondale *alone*—was the instigatrix of that diabolic crime!"

"And has not your lordship as yet taken measures," inquired William, "to wean away Lord Harold Staunton from the dreadful companionship of Lady Saxondale?"

"Not yet—not yet," replied the Marquis. "What measures could I take? Did we not expect some startling revelations from Chiffin? and was it not all a snare to plunge us into destruction? In respect to the complicity of Lady Saxondale therein, we ourselves may be convinced of it—but we could not establish the charge against her: we have no evidence of its truth. If we were to accuse her of hiring or engaging a detestable bravo to take our lives, she would boldly and indignantly deny it. But the time cannot be far distant when her character must be fully exposed: it is impossible that deeds so foul as her's can long be enacted without involving her in ruin. This woman who is coming to-night, will perhaps have revelations to make in connexion with the fearful incident in Agar Town. If she could but furnish us with positive proofs that the villain Chiffin was employed by Lady Saxondale, it would be all we should require to serve the twofold purpose in view: namely, to rescue my nephew from the power of that evil genius who has cast her spells around him—and to compel her to give the most signal contradiction to the calumny which she has so basely propagated, William, relative to yourself. But, ah! methought I heard the garden gate open."

"Doubtless it is the woman," observed Angela, glancing towards a time-piece on the mantel: "for it only wants two minutes to nine o'clock."

Silence now prevailed in the parlour, the three occupants of which were plunged in a state of considerable suspense. A single knock—but given somewhat imperiously—was heard at the front door: the female servant hastened to answer the summons; and just as the time-piece began ringing forth, with its silver notes, the hour of nine, Madge Somers made her appearance.

"I am punctual," she said, in her terse abrupt manner: and without ceremony she took a chair.

When thus seated—with her face towards the Marquis of Eagledean, Angela, and Deveril—her back was towards the half-open casement which the curtains covered.

"Yes—you are punctual," said Lord Eagledean; "and as you may suppose, we are all three profoundly anxious to learn what you have to communicate. This young lady," he added, glancing towards Angela, "is Mr. Deveril's sister."

"Ah! his sister, eh?" observed Madge, with a singular expression of countenance: but as it immediately passed away, and her looks resumed their usual harsh and rigid aspect, she said, "I told you, William Deveril, that I would meet you here at the expiration of a month—day for day and hour for hour—from the time when the appointment was given in Lincolnshire. I have kept my word. But of what avail would it be for me to boast this punctuality, unless in the meantime I had discovered him whom I vowed to seek for?"

"Thompson?" ejaculated our hero, with a sudden start that denoted the feverish anxiety which galvanized him at the moment. "And have you found him? have you been successful?"

"Assuredly," answered Madge: "or else wherefore am I here? Did I not assure you that if he were still in the land of the living, I would find him out—and that if he were dead I would obtain proof of his decease? But he *is* alive—I have discovered him. Scarcely an hour has elapsed since I parted from that man whom I have thus so unwearyingly sought."

"Then the secret which I imagined to have died with my poor father, is now known to you?" said

Deveril, with increasing anxiety and suspense—a feeling that was fully shared by his sister and the Marquis.

"This secret was known to me all along," replied the woman curtly. "I merely sought a corroboration from the lips of him who, after all you told me in Lincolnshire, I felt assured could furnish it."

"And this secret—my poor father's secret?" exclaimed our hero. "Oh! keep me not in suspense——"

"Do not excite yourself, young man," interrupted Madge. "I am not going to run away in a moment—nor perhaps for an hour. Indeed, we have much to talk about. But you speak of your father—of him who died in Italy——"

"And who was so kind and excellent a father to us!" ejaculated William, taking Angela's hand and gazing affectionately upon her countenance, as he thus referred to the tender care which she as well as himself had received from the late Mr. Deveril.

"Your father—humph!" observed Madge, in so singular a manner that the eyes of all three were concentrated upon her in a moment. "Now, William Deveril," she continued, "if I have not at once entered upon the object of my visit—if I have not rushed eagerly into these explanations which you are naturally so anxious to receive—and if I still feel it necessary to indulge in a few prefatory words, it is because the secret I have to make known is one of such importance——"

At this instant the curtain which covered the casement, suddenly flew aside and a man rushed in. A shriek thrilled from Angela's lips, while cries of horror burst from those of the Marquis and our hero: for the bright blade of a dagger or clasp-knife which the intruder held, gleamed above the head of Madge Somers. She half-started from her seat, as that sudden rush from behind and the cries of alarm from those in front, simultaneously smote her ears: but ere a single syllable issued from *her* lips, the weapon was driven deep down into her shoulder, and she fell like a weight of lead upon the floor. The next instant the assassin was gone.

All this was the work of a moment—a single moment. The man had no sooner made his appearance than the blow was stricken, and he vanished like a spectre. Had his person been previously unknown to Deveril and the Marquis, they would have been utterly unable to give the slightest description of it: but the impression which seized upon them both at the instant, was that he was none other than Chiffin the Cannibal.

Angela flew to raise up the unfortunate woman—the Marquis rushed to her assistance—and the next moment William Deveril, without his hat—without a weapon of any kind, dashed through the open casement and sped in pursuit of the murderer.

"She breathes! she is not dead!" cried Angela, who with her own hand had extracted the knife from the wound, and with her kerchief was endeavouring to staunch the blood which welled forth in a torrent the instant the weapon was withdrawn.

The servants, who had been alarmed by the cries which had reached their ears from the parlour, now made their hurried and frightened appearance; and they were stricken with dismay on beholding the terrific spectacle. But Angela, who in this awful crisis preserved all her presence of mind, bade them assist her in laying the woman upon the sofa—while the Marquis, hurriedly inquiring where the nearest surgeon dwelt, sped away to procure his assistance. During his absence everything was done that could be thought of to arrest the flow of the vital current; and when the medical man arrived in company with Lord Eagledean, he at once approved of the measures thus adopted.

The woman lived; but she was entirely unconscious of what was going on. The surgeon examined the wound, and expressed his belief that it was not mortal, but that little short of a miracle could prevent it from proving fatal. Angela at once decided that Madge Somers should be taken care of at the house, and not removed elsewhere: for whither could she be removed, save to a hospital or a workhouse? those who surrounded her, being utterly ignorant of the place of her abode. But not for an instant did the generous-hearted Angela entertain any other idea than that the unfortunate woman should be cared for beneath that roof; and she assisted her servants to convey her as gently as possible to a bed-room up-stairs. The medical man did all that was requisite on his side, and took his departure, with a promise to call again at an early hour in the morning.

It must not be thought that either Angela or the Marquis had omitted to notice the abrupt pursuit which William Deveril undertook after the assassin; and while an almost frantic terror had for an instant seized upon the young lady, the direst apprehensions took possession of Lord Eagledean, at the thought that William might meet his death, unarmed as he was, at the hands of the desperate Cannibal. But, as we have seen, their own goading alarms did not prevent either the magnanimous young lady or the generous nobleman from doing all in their power on behalf of Madge Somers: and it was not until the surgeon had taken his departure that they had a moment's leisure to express to each other the sore misgivings they felt with regard to our hero. He had now been absent nearly an hour; and Angela's terrors became torturingly poignant. The presence of mind which she had preserved as long as it was needed to enable her to minister to the wounded woman, totally gave way; and, half frantic, she was rushing forth without bonnet or shawl to look for William. But the Marquis, holding her back, conjured her to compose herself,—vowing that he would undertake the search. At the very instant, however, that the nobleman was on the point of issuing from the villa, our young hero made his appearance, breathless and exhausted—his dress in disorder—his hat battered—his garments dusty—and with every indication of having gone through some desperate struggle.

But Angela beheld not at the moment these evidences of a conflict. Wild with joy at William's safe return, she flew into his arms and covered him with kisses; then the Marquis of Eagledean proffered him his congratulation in his turn; and as William asked hurriedly concerning the wounded woman, Angela and Lord Eagledean now noticed the plight he was in. The young lady was once more seized with terror lest he should have sustained some injury: but he speedily reassured her on this point; and then in reply to his own queries, she made him aware of all that had been done in respect to Madge Somers.

"Not merely because she is a fellow-creature," said William Deveril,—"nor merely because she saved his lordship and me from the pitfall prepared for us, must she be ministered unto and surrounded with the most assiduous attentions: but likewise because her life is indeed a most precious one so far as I am concerned. For it is but too evident that she is acquainted with some secret of the utmost importance nearly and closely concerning me."

"Rest assured, dear brother," said Angela, "that she shall receive all possible care."

"I know it—I know it," exclaimed William quickly: "do not think, sweet Angela, it was a hint I conveyed—it was merely a remark which circumstances called forth."

"You are right, William," observed the Marquis, thoughtfully and even solemnly: "that woman is indeed acquainted with some secret of vital import to your interests:—otherwise she would not have so carefully prepared you as it were for the revelation she was about to make. But what it could be, defies the possibility of conjecture."

"But you, my dear brother—you are sinking with exhaustion!" exclaimed Angela. "You are overwhelmed with fatigue! Recline yourself upon the sofa; and let me give you some refreshment."

The amiable girl proceeded to mix some wine and water, which she presented to William; and he drank the beverage with avidity. He then proceeded to relate all that had occurred during his hour's absence from the villa.

"You saw how I precipitated myself after that murderous villain: but on reaching the gate I paused for a few moments to ascertain if I could catch the sounds of retreating footsteps in any direction. I could hear nothing. The thought occurred to me that the assassin would scarcely proceed in the direction of London, but would rather make for the open country. With this impression I bounded away along the last-mentioned route; and the excited state of my feelings lent wings to my feet. I found myself almost flying: I was astonished at my own speed. In a few minutes my ear caught the sound of footsteps ahead. Swifter and swifter became my pace; and the ruffian—for it was he—finding himself pursued, suddenly stopped short. The next moment we were face to face. It was in a lonely part where we thus met. With one glance the fellow appeared to assure himself that I was unarmed: he drew a pistol from his pocket—but quick as lightning, I sprang aside and the bullet whizzed past my ear. Then I seized upon him; but he broke away from me with the power of a giant—indeed with such force, that I was whirled round and thrown against a fence. He rushed away with a savage yell resembling that of a wild beast, and in a few moments his footsteps were lost in the distance. Again I sped onward: for never in all my life had I experienced such a boiling rage. For at least a quarter of an hour I hurried along without knowing whether I was on the miscreant's track, and without reflecting that even if I overtook him, the conflict between us would be most unequal, not merely because he had probably other weapons about him, but likewise on account of his infinitely superior physical strength. No—in the hurry of my thoughts and the excitement of my feelings, I was unconscious of danger—or indifferent to it; and on I went. But at the expiration of the quarter of an hour that I have named, and on reaching a still more lonely part than that where I had first overtaken him, I came up with the villain again. He was now crouched up under the shade of a tree, and evidently waiting to spring upon me as I passed: but fortunately the gloom of that place was not so deep but that I caught sight of the assassin's form—and he did not therefore take me at a disadvantge. It is certain that he had not another loaded pistol, or he would have fired it: but with the butt-end of the one he held in his hand, he levelled a terrific blow at my head. I caught his arm as he thus sprang towards me; and he fell backwards. I threw myself upon him; and it must have been an almost preternatural power that possessed me at the moment: for I wrenched the pistol from his grasp, and holding it above his head, threatened to strike him with it unless he remained quiet. Then I cried for assistance: but none came. A desperate struggle ensued: the villain in his turn tore the pistol from my hand—but instantaneously recovering it, I thus prevented him from dealing me a blow that would probably have been fatal. He tried to wrench it again from me; and I flung it to a distance. Assassin as he is, I did not like even in my rage to strike him with that weapon. It now appeared to be a struggle of life and death between us—or rather I should say on my part: for if he had mastered me, never should I have left that place alive. Loudly did I continue to call for succour; and still none came. For several minutes did this frightful struggle last: but fortunately the whole time I remained uppermost, with the villain lying under me. At last I felt my strength going: it was impossible for me to keep in that position any longer;—and if the conflict were continued, I should have become his victim, instead of having the satisfaction (as I at first hoped) of securing him as a prisoner. With one tremendous effort he succeeded in disengaging his arms from the grasp which I had maintained upon them during all the latter portion of the struggle: and then, to prevent myself from being thrown underneath, I sprang up to my feet. Quick as lightning he did the same; and taking another pistol from his pocket, he held it by the barrel as he sprang towards me with the fury of a tiger. My hat had fallen off in the conflict; and if the butt-end of that weapon had dealt the blow which the miscreant levelled at me, it would doubtless have killed me on the spot. The sudden sense of this new danger resuscitated all my energies in a moment: I closed with him again—again too did I succeed in wrenching the pistol from his grasp: but at the same moment it fell from my hand. He broke away from me—stooped down—snatched up the weapon—and in the madness of his rage, hurled it at me with all his force. Fortunately I escaped this last attack; and the pistol fell into a hedge. The ruffian now took to his heels and fled precipitately. I still pursued him, continuing to cry for assistance: but I overtook him not again. Wearied and exhausted, I sat down to rest for a few minutes; and then made the best of my way homeward."

Angela shuddered as she thus learnt the dangers from which Deveril had escaped, and the magnitude of which he had by no means exaggerated.

The Marquis of Eaglesdean now took his leave,

promising to return on the morrow and see how the wounded woman got on. In the meanwhile a nurse, whom the medical man had undertaken to send, arrived at the Villa; and to her special care was Madge Somers consigned. She passed a somewhat more tranquil night than could have been expected under the circumstances; and when the surgeon called in the morning, he was enabled to pronounce a still more favourable opinion than he had delivered on the previous evening. That is to say, he entertained a strong hope of the woman's ultimate recovery. But she continued speechless, as well as unconscious of where she was—of what had happened—and indeed of all that was passing around her; and the medical man in reply to Deveril's anxious questions, stated that many days must elapse—perhaps even weeks—before she would recover the power of utterance.

Soon after breakfast, the Marquis of Eagledean made his appearance, accompanied by Frank. He and Deveril then consulted together as to the necessity of giving information to the police-authorities of the murderous outrage which had been perpetrated. It did not suit their purposes to enter into particulars relative to their previous acquaintance with the villain Chiffin; and yet, on the other hand, it was clearly impossible to keep justice in ignorance of the crime that had been committed. It was accordingly agreed that Deveril should repair to the station-house, and give information of the circumstances of the assault, together with the fullest description of its perpetrator. The inspector of police, to whom this communication was made, instantaneously recognised Chiffin the Cannibal from the portraiture that was drawn of him; and he promised Mr. Deveril that no time should be lost in setting the officers of justice upon the search.

Having transacted his business at the station-house, our young hero returned to the Villa. The Marquis of Eagledean took an opportunity of speaking to him alone; and he now for the first time communicated the object of Frank Paton's recent journey into Lincolnshire. William Deveril was astonished to hear of the youth's unfortunate attachment for Juliana Farefield: but he congratulated the Marquis on the escape which his son had experienced from being entangled in the wiles of a young woman whose morals were evidently so loose and whose character was so unprincipled.

"Although Frank," said Lord Eagledean, "yielded to the advice of a very conscientious friend—I mean Mr. Denison—and renounced for ever all idea of accompanying Miss Farefield to the altar, yet it has not been without a pang that he has resigned himself to this decision. His own good sense convinces him of the propriety of the step: but his young heart, naturally affectionate, cannot put away from it in a moment an image which had made so deep an impression upon it. He is therefore in a somewhat desponding state of mind; and methought that a little change of scene, and the companionship of kind friends, would tend to cheer his spirits. I therefore proposed that he should pass the day with you. It is not necessary that your sister should be acquainted with all the past in respect to my son's unfortunate love for Juliana Farefield: but I am sure that you will both do your best to cheer him as much as possible."

"If he would stay with us a week or a month, instead of a single day," replied Deveril, "he would be most welcome."

"I know it—I know it, my young friend," responded the Marquis. "We shall see. Frank can do as he likes in the matter. And now I must bid you farewell for the present: for I intend to go and consult my solicitor anew in respect to the course which ought to be adopted on your behalf in respect to Lady Saxondale."

Lord Eagledean took his departure; and Frank remained at the Villa. In the middle of the day William Deveril repaired to Cavendish Square to pay his usual visit to his beloved Florina; and Frank was left alone with Angela. The amiable young lady saw that the lad was not altogether in the best possible spirits; and though she knew not the cause, nor thought fit to inquire, she exerted herself with the most ingenuous affability to amuse and cheer him. She showed him her drawings—she likewise opened William Deveril's well stored portfolio—she played several pieces on the piano—and she walked with him in the garden. The youth could not possibly help contrasting the elegant simplicity and natural good-temper of Angela's disposition with the artificial and deceptive character of Juliana Farefield: so that he soon began to take pleasure in the society of his fair companion. By the time Deveril returned from Cavendish Square,—and his visit thither on this occasion was short, as he did not think it kind to absent himself too long from home on account of his guest,—the latter had recovered much of his wonted cheerfulness; and the evening was passed most agreeably. It having been left to Frank's option how long he would stay at the Villa, he made but little difficulty in yielding to William Deveril's invitation to pass a few days there: for our hero felt himself to be under such signal and manifold obligations to the Marquis, that it rejoiced him to be enabled to show any attention to his son. Frank did therefore remain: and during the week which he thus spent at Deveril's abode, his walks with Angela were not confined to the garden—they were extended to the Regent's Park. The more he saw of this young lady, the less regretfully did he look back upon the loss of Juliana. Not that he could immediately banish the latter from his memory—or that he all in an instant fell head over ears in love with Angela Deveril: but it was impossible that the companionship of so sweet, so amiable, and so charming a creature could do otherwise than exercise a gently soothing influence over his wounded spirit. And then too, on the score of beauty, Angela was incomparably superior to Juliana Farefield. The latter was voluptuously splendid and sensuously dazzling: but the former was of a pure etherial loveliness which appealed only to the sentiment, and refined instead of provoking the grosser feelings of the heart.

At the expiration of the week Francis Paton returned to Stamford Manor: and his parents, as well as his sister, were rejoiced to perceive that a marked change had taken place in his spirits. In the course of the day on which he thus came back to the paternal abode, he and Elisabeth walked out alone together in the grounds; and after some conversation on indifferent topics, the lady observed with a sly and furtive look at her brother, "Perhaps my dear Frank, you will yet find that there are

women in the world as handsome and as captivating as Juliana Farefield,—and certainly more virtuous."

"What do you mean, Elisabeth?" asked the youth quickly; for as he glanced towards his sister, he caught upon her handsome countenance the half-vanishing expression of archness which had been conjured up thereon by the thought that was uppermost in her mind at the moment.

"Nothing particular, dear Frank," she responded: "only that I suppose you do not purpose to devote your life to cynical regrets for the loss of Juliana? Depend upon it," she added, more seriously, "it is no loss—but a very fortunate escape for you. A young woman who could have proposed that when she was married to another, you should remain as her pensioned lover——"

"Enough, Elizabeth! do not speak of it!" interrupted Frank. "There is something dreadful in the mere contemplation of such depravity. Besides," he went on to observe, without exactly knowing that he was giving audible utterance to his musings, "after having passed a week in the companionship of the pure-minded and virtuous Angela Deveril, it is impossible not to be struck with the contrast which she presents to Juliana Farefield."

"Ah! then you think that Angela is infinitely Juliana's superior?" said Elisabeth Paton, without looking at her brother as she spoke.

"It is impossible to think otherwise!" he exclaimed, with a degree of fervour that conjured up a smile to his sister's moist red lips; but she did not suffer Frank to perceive that his observation had made any particular impression on her.

"And the beauty of Angela?" she remarked, as if quite casually and in a purely gossipping strain: "do you think she is equal to Miss Farefield?"

"She is superior—incomparably superior!" rejoined Frank, still with an unconscious fervour in his accents. "But why do you question me thus, Elisabeth?" he suddenly asked, as a suspicion of her motive flashed to his mind.

"Because, my dear brother," she answered gaily, as she turned her beaming countenance upon him, "you are already as much in love with Angela Deveril as ever you were with Juliana Farefield; and therefore your case is not very hopeless—and I do not think you will die of disappointment, or forsake the world and turn hermit, on account of your disappointment in Lincolnshire. But, Ah! there is Diego!"

With these last words Elisabeth Paton flitted away from her brother, and sped to join the handsome Spanish nobleman, who had at that moment entered the grounds.

Francis thus remained alone at some distance from the mansion, and in the vicinage of that shady avenue of trees where we once before saw him walking on the occasion that he waited for his sister to bring him the decision of their parents in respect to his suit with Juliana Farefield. He stood still for some minutes, struck with the last speech which Elisabeth had made ere quitting him. Her words were to him a revelation of the changing condition of his own mind; and at length he said to himself, "Is it possible that in one short week Angela Deveril could have made this impression on me?"

He wished to analyse his feelings—to dissect his thoughts—to commune with himself. He advanced farther along the avenue—he reached a gate in the palings at the extremity—he issued forth, and continued his ramble along a shady lane. So absorbed in reflection was he, that he did not perceive himself to be the object of attention on the part of a man who was loitering near. Yet such was the case. This individual was a respectable-looking and decently dressed person, of middle age, but with a sharp cunning countenance. As already stated, he he surveyed Francis Paton with attention; and at length muttered to himself, "Yes—this must be him!"

At this moment the youth caught sight of him; and observing how the man regarded him with interest, Frank looked at him in a way calculated to encourage him to speak, if such indeed were his object.

"You are Mr. Paton, I presume?" said the stranger: and on receiving an affirmative response, he at once produced a letter, which the youth took.

"Miss Farefield's writing!" ejaculated Frank: and his first impulse was to give it back to the hand from which he had just received it.

"No, sir—I cannot take it again," said this individual. "I beg that you will read it—I have come all the way from Lincolnshire to look for you. Indeed, I have been searching after you for some days past; and now that I have succeeded in finding you——"

"Did Miss Farefield send you? and how did you find me out?" demanded Frank, suddenly interrupting the stranger. "Tell me also who you are?"

"Softly, sir—I cannot answer too many questions at once. First of all, I must inform you that I am the brother of Lady Saxondale's steward on the Lincolnshire estate; and my name is Woodman. Miss Farefield, knowing I am trustworthy, sent me on this little errand; and she told me I was to be particular in seeing you alone—and only to give this letter into your hand."

"Well—but how did you find me out?"

"I will deal frankly and candidly with you, sir," responded Woodman. "Miss Farefield knew that you had a sister who passed by the name of Mrs. Chandos—or at least used to do—and who had a cottage somewhere in the neighbourhood of Tottenham. So I went to that cottage: but the woman there did not like to tell me anything about you. It was only this morning, on paying her a second visit, that I succeeded on some pretext in getting any information at all: then she told me that I might perhaps hear of you at Stamford Manor——"

"And do you know to whom Stamford Manor belongs?" demanded Frank quickly: for it now struck him that probably his father's *incognito*, which he still preserved, might not have been so well sustained as his lordship thought.

"I have heard it belongs to a Mr. Gunthorpe," answered Woodman: and there was nothing in his look or his manner to make Frank suspect that he was acquainted with anything more.

"But about this letter," said the youth: "I cannot take it—I cannot read it——no, I must not!"—and yet he could not help feeling somewhat anxious to know what Juliana had to communicate: it was that feeling of curiosity which naturally resulted from all the love he had borne her and all that had passed between them.

"Mr. Paton," said Woodman, assuming a solemn demeanour, "it is of the highest possible consequence that you read that letter. Miss Farefield, expecting that perhaps you would hesitate, enjoined me to tell you that it may be the last she will ever have to write to you—and, in short, there is something to be submitted for your decision——"

"Then, in that case," interrupted Frank, "I will read the letter:"—and he said to himself, "There will be no harm; for whatever she may say, will not alter the decision to which on my part I have already come."

He accordingly broke the seal, stepped aside, and read the letter, the contents of which ran as follow:—

"I know not in what terms I ought to address you. You fled precipitately from Lincolnshire, notwithstanding the appointment I gave you; and you have not written to me a single word of explanation. This is not well done on your part. Remember that when you were but a humble and obscure youth—and that is but a few weeks ago—I treated you as my equal: I gave you my love—I encouraged you to believe that you were not destined to be what I found you; and you thanked me in enthusiastic terms for those words that were a solace to your soul. You recently put me to what you considered to be a *test*; and if I had agreed at once to wed you, you would have joyously assented. What then is my fault? That having no fortune of my own, I could not bring my mind to take a step that should drag you down into the depths of poverty; and that in the ardour—or I may call it in the *frenzy* of my love—I suggested a course which though unjustifiable upon a moral ground, was nevertheless the alternative to which hope alone could fly. And it is for this I am abandoned! for this that I am discarded! The immensity of my affection is made a source of woe, and sorrow, and bitterness to myself!

"But there is another subject to which I must direct your attention. Did I follow my mother's example in scorning you on account of your sister's criminality? No: far from it. When I discovered the ground upon which Lady Saxondale sent you forth from the mansion in Park Lane, I upbraided her bitterly for her conduct; and when you appeared before me the other day in the Castle-gardens, I received you with open arms—I thought not the worse of you on your sister's account. In this therefore, as in all other respects, Frank, have I given you signal proofs of my fervid and devoted love. Cannot you therefore, forget and forgive one little error on my part? can you not attribute to the strength of my attachment that proposition which appears to have shocked you so much, but which was made in the moment of my heart's profound despair?

"And now, Frank, after having thus appealed to you for the last time, I require your decision. Is everything to be at an end between us? or shall the past, in so far as I have offended, be forgotten and forgiven? Your prompt reply is necessary. Delay not: or, if after a little while you should repent your decision and wish to seek me again, it will be too late!

"One word more, Frank. I have no doubt you are acting under the guidance of your newly-found parents, whoever they may be: but parents are not always the best counsellors—or at least their advice is not always compatible with the promptings of their children's hearts. Think you that my mother, for instance, would have looked kindly upon my love for you at the time that it commenced? Would she even *now*—(no matter how altered your circumstances may be)—after what you have been, and considering what she knows of your sister? And yet I have been all along prepared to sacrifice everything to my love for you. Can you sacrifice nothing for me? Go to your parents—throw yourself at their feet—tell them that your happiness is bound up in me—and they will yet consent to our marriage. They must be kind hearted, or they would not even have consented that you should put me to the test for which purpose you came into Lincolnshire. At all events send me your prompt decision—whether everything is at an end between us, or not? The bearer of this missive is trustworthy; and immediately upon receiving your answer, he will set off on his return into Lincolnshire. Frank, I conjure you not to achieve the unhappiness of one who loves you tenderly and well!

"Your affectionate,
"J. F."

To say that Frank Paton was not moved by this epistle would be to speak incorrectly. He *was* at first much moved; and he even thought within himself that his conduct had been too harsh and severe—his judgment relative to Juliana too stern and implacable. He could not help feeling that there was much truth in many passages of her letter; and when he had finished reading it, he remained standing on the spot to which he had stepped aside—reflecting profoundly. But gradually the conviction that this was only a well studied piece of sophistry—the craftily worded appeal of a designing woman—stole into his mind: and then too, as gradually and as slowly, arose up before him the image of Angela Deveril, like a good genius with outstretched hand to draw him away from the brink of destruction. His resolve was taken; and rending the letter into the minutest fragments, he tossed them away.

"What answer am I to bear back, sir?" inquired Woodman, now accosting the youth. "Doubtless you purpose to write your reply—and I will remain here until you bring it to me."

"No," returned Frank: "it is unnecessary. Tell Miss Farefield that I abide by the result of the test—and she will understand you. More I need not say."

With these words Francis Paton turned abruptly round—hurried up the lane—and was speedily lost to the view of the emissary from Lincolnshire.

But as the youth retraced his way towards the Manor, one circumstance almost more than any other engrossed his thoughts and filled him with perplexity and bewilderment. That letter which he had written at Mr. Denison's, and under this gentleman's dictation—had not Juliana received it? He could scarcely think so: for it was worded in a strain so cutting—so humiliating—that it was impossible to suppose that after the perusal of it she could ever again have regarded him with any other feeling than that of a vindictive hate. In *her* letter there was not the slightest allusion to that one which he had penned. Indeed, the very opening lines of Juliana's epistle reproached him for not writing to her; and indicated an uncertainty on her part as to the resolve to which he might have come when leaving Lincolnshire. No: it was evident enough that Juliana had not received the letter which he had written at Mr. Denison's dictation. But wherefore had she not received it? Had Mr Denison himself, on second thoughts, suppressed it? or had it been sent and miscarried? Frank was bewildered: he knew not what to think;—and in this mood he walked on towards the mansion.

Near the principal entrance he encountered the Marquis of Eagledean; and feeling that his countenance would betray that something had occurred, even if he himself should hesitate to reveal it,—feeling likewise that he ought not to keep anything

secret from that kind and generous-hearted parent,—he at once told the Marquis all that had just taken place. Though he had destroyed the letter, he nevertheless remembered the precise tenour of its contents: and these he repeated,—omitting however, with a natural delicacy, all mention of those passages which alluded to his sister.

"My dear Frank," said the Marquis, in the kindest tone, "you have done wisely to avoid the snare which this syren has set to entrap you. I rejoice also in the candour with which you have just communicated the incident: depend upon it, my son, such frankness will find its reward."

"Since we are again speaking upon this subject, my dear father," observed the youth, "I am reminded that I have not as yet written to Mr. Hawkshaw according to my promise. Surely towards that gentleman there can be no need for you to preserve an *incognito*, as he himself would be the last in the world to frustrate any purposes you may have in view. Besides, Mr. Denison knows that you are in England; and wherefore not Mr. Hawkshaw, who behaved so kindly towards me?"

"My dear Frank," responded the Marquis, "have a little patience,—and in a few days there will no longer be any necessity for me to keep the *incognito* towards any one."

CHAPTER CIV.

THE MESSENGER'S RETURN.—THE WEDDING-DAY.

THE fortnight which was to elapse ere the double marriage of Lady Saxondale and Juliana took place, was drawing to a close—the day for the nuptials was near at hand—and all the arrangements were made for the solemnisation of the ceremonies. It was settled that the weddings should take place by special license at Saxondale Castle, and at the hour of noon—so that immediately after the nuptials, Lady Saxondale and her husband would take their departure for London on the one hand, while on the other Mr. Hawkshaw would bear away his bride to the Hall. The ceremony was to be conducted with as much privacy as could be observed in such matters,—only those whose assistance was absolutely necessary, being invited. Such were the arrangements; and, as above stated, the day was now close at hand.

It was evening: and Juliana was seated alone in the drawing-room—her mother being in the library, writing letters—and Lord Harold rambling by himself in the garden. Miss Farefield felt particularly restless and uneasy: she was anxiously expecting the return of her messenger; for on the response he brought back, depended the course she had to pursue. Earnestly did she hope that Francis Paton would send a reply favourable to her wishes: for she more than dreaded—she had the almost absolute certainty—that her amour with him, which had commenced two months back, would not be without its consequences. In short, she felt assured that she was in a way to become a mother. But if Frank were to refuse, should she still marry Mr. Hawkshaw? Yes: she saw no alternative. He was so fond—so confiding—he evidently put such implicit faith in her, that she might deceive him as to the paternity of the child which would thus be born seven months after their union. At all events, her position was desperate: she must marry some one; and if not Francis—why, then it must be Hawkshaw! Her mind was thus made up; and though her resolve was in one of its alternatives so treacherous and so criminal, she nevertheless swerved not from it. But at the same time she could not help feeling restless and uneasy as to the result of the letter she had sent to London,—a result upon which so much depended—a result, in short, which must decide whether she was to marry the one lover or the other.

In the midst of this unsettled mood of her's, on the particular evening of which we are writing, a domestic entered the apartment to announce that Mr. Woodman, the steward's brother, desired an audience of Miss Farefield. She at once ordered the man to be shown up; and during the few moments that elapsed ere her emissary made his appearance, the suspense she endured was of the most painful description. She felt the colour coming and going with the most rapid transitions upon her cheeks; and the palpitations of her heart were plainly audible. For, Oh! she ardently longed that Frank might be restored to her; and perhaps the sensuous fervour of that passion which she had all along felt for him, was now mingling with a somewhat more tender and even a purer feeling, since she had been led to suspect that she should become a mother—and he the father of the babe thus to be born!

When Woodman entered the drawing-room, Juliana could not immediately put to him the question to which she so ardently longed for an answer. Nor did she instantaneously perceive in his look or manner anything sufficiently significant to relieve her from suspense.

"You have seen him? you have been successful?" she at length said, perceiving that he did not at once speak of his own accord.

"After considerable trouble, Miss, I found Mr. Paton——"

"And you gave him the letter? and he read it? and——and——he has not sent me a reply?"

"Only a verbal one," responded the emissary.

"Ah! a verbal one?" echoed Juliana, perceiving at once that all hope was dead in that quarter: and making a merit of necessity, she concealed her vexation—her grief too—beneath a look of suddenly assumed haughty scorn. "And what was this verbal answer?"

"Mr. Paton said, Miss," rejoined Woodman, "that he would abide by the result of the test, and that you would understand his meaning."

"Yes—I understand it——Oh, to be sure! I understand it!"—and then Juliana bit her lips with vexation; and it was only with a powerful effort she could keep back the tears of mingled spite and rage, disappointment and affliction——aye, and mortification likewise. "Thank you—thank you, Woodman, for the fidelity with which you have accomplished this mission. Here is the reward I promised you;"—and drawing forth her purse, she produced bank-notes and gold, from which she selected the sum of twenty pounds; but her hands trembled, and her fingers could scarcely hold the notes to count out the pieces.

"I am very much obliged to you, Miss," said Woodman, as he gathered up the money.

"I need scarcely repeat," murmured Juliana, "what I have already said—that this is in the strictest confidence——"

"You know, Miss, that you can rely upon me—— And besides, you promised——"

"Yes: that I would provide for you well in some way or another. Fear nothing—I shall not forget my pledge—you shall have a good situation found you. But one word more! Where does this Mr. Paton live? and who are his parents?"

"He lives, Miss, at a very splendid seat near London——It is called Stamford Manor, being on a hill of that name——"

"But his parents—who are they?" demanded the young lady, somewhat impatiently.

"I could not exactly discover whether his parents lived there or not: I had so little time to make inquiries when once I had found Mr. Paton out—for your injunctions were so positive for me to lose no time in returning immediately after I had seen him——"

"Well, but who lives at the house, then?" demanded Juliana.

"A gentleman by the name of Gunthorpe," was the response.

"Gunthorpe?" echoed Juliana. "No wonder, then, that everything has failed," she murmured to herself: "for that man seems to be the evil genius of our family!"—then she added aloud, "No—Mr. Gunthorpe cannot be his father. Probably Mr. Paton is on a visit to him. That is sufficient, Woodman: you can retire."

The man accordingly bowed and took his departure from the room, leaving Juliana to ponder upon the information he had brought her. She did not however remain long thus ruminating; but proceeding to the library, advanced straight up to the table where Lady Saxondale was seated—and said, "Mother, have you heard anything lately relative to your friend Mr. Gunthorpe?"

"*My friend*, Juliana?" at once exclaimed Lady Saxondale, laying down her pen: "what means this ill timed jest?"

"It is no jest, mother," responded the daughter. "I merely put a simple question, to which you might, had you chosen, have returned an equally plain answer."

"But why the question at all?"

"Simply because I have learnt that Francis Paton is very intimate with Mr. Gunthorpe—that, indeed, this youth is at present on a visit to that gentleman——"

"Gentleman!" said Lady Saxondale, contemptuously: "do you call a vulgar money-grubbing banker a gentleman?"

"No, certainly—I was wrong. That *person*, then," said Juliana.

"But what has it all got to do with us? Everything that regards Francis Paton," added Lady Saxondale, maliciously, "is of interest to you—and not to me."

"Perhaps. And yet methought you would like to know that Francis is thus intimate with Mr. Gunthorpe. Considering how Mr. Gunthorpe took it upon himself to interfere in your affairs—in respect, you know, mother, to a certain William Deveril," continued Juliana, now speaking maliciously in her turn, "it struck me as being somewhat ominous and suspicious that Mr. Gunthorpe should have as his guest this youth who was once in your service."

"I can see in it nothing but a coincidence," observed Lady Saxondale: and she took up her pen to resume her writing.

"You have not forgotten, mother," said Juliana, after a pause, "that this Mr. Gunthorpe came to England recommended as the very intimate friend of the Marquis of Eagledean; and as the Marquis is Lord Harold Staunton's uncle, I did not know whether it were at all possible for Mr. Gunthorpe to take any step in respect to your contemplated marriage."

"What step can he take?" inquired Lady Saxondale coldly. "For my part, I am no love-sick girl; and if the marriage were prevented, it would not break my heart. But it cannot be: Lord Harold Staunton is of age and his own master. Besides, the Marquis of Eagledean, who is no doubt still in Italy, cannot have given Mr. Gunthorpe *carte blanche* to interfere as he chooses with Lord Harold Staunton's affairs—even if he should have heard of our intended marriage at all."

"Most likely he has," observed Juliana: "for Francis Paton, who is now staying with him, having been in Lincolnshire a fortnight back——"

"When nothing was known of this intended marriage of mine," interjected her ladyship.

"Not positively known—but more than half suspected," continued Juliana. "To tell you the truth, for my part I like as little as may be the idea of this meddling Mr. Gunthorpe knowing anything at all about the affairs of our family. I will tell you something which has struck me as being singular. You remember that Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril——"

"Well, well, Juliana," said her ladyship, somewhat impatiently,

"You remember, I say," continued the daughter, "that they were down here in Lincolnshire about five or six weeks back——just at the [illegible] time when the murder of those women took p[illegible]"

"Well, well, Juliana," said Lady [illegible] still more impatiently than before: and indeed she appeared *very* impatient at the prolongation of the discourse, or else at the turn it was taking.

"And very soon afterwards," added Miss Farefield, "Lady Macdonald and Florina left us so abruptly—indeed with an abruptness, said with a singularity of manner too, that savoured of actual rudeness. Do you not think that Mr. Gunthorpe's visit with Deveril to Lincolnshire on that occasion, was somehow or another connected with the precipitate departure of Florina and her aunt a few days afterwards?"

"Yes," observed Lady Saxondale: "it is not the first time that the idea has struck me."

"And then, too," continued Juliana, "you remember that when Edmund wrote to me, saying that his match was broken off, and he knew it was all through that meddling old scamp Gunthorpe—those were his very words——"

"Well, Juliana," interposed Lady Saxondale, "there can be no doubt that this Mr. Gunthorpe has been endeavouring to do me and mine all the mischief he could: but we must not exalt him into such importance as to believe that he is an ogre, or

an enchanter, or a magician, constantly lying in wait to devour us or work us an injury, and possessing the power to do either. But you seem superstitious, Juliana, upon the point?"

"I candidly confess, mother," replied the young lady, "that I do not like the idea of Mr. Gunthorpe acquiring any further insight into our affairs or our plans through the medium of young Paton."

"Did Francis Paton know that you were engaged to Mr. Hawkshaw?" inquired Lady Saxondale.

"I think not," was Juliana's response: "but who can tell?"

"If he did," observed the mother, "you are doubtless afraid that he has by this time informed Mr. Gunthorpe, and that Mr. Gunthorpe will act as a marplot?"

"I scarcely know what I think, or what I apprehend," answered Juliana. "All I know is that I could wish Frank had not formed an intimacy with that meddling old fellow."

With these words the young lady quitted the library; and hastening back to the drawing-room, she rang the bell. Of the footman who answered the summons, she inquired if Woodman was still within the castle-walls; and being informed that he was partaking of refreshments in the servants' hall, Juliana ordered him to be sent up. In a few minutes Woodman re-appeared in her presence.

"I forgot to ask you one or two questions," she said. "You did not mention to Mr. Paton anything relative to my engagement——I mean my rumoured marriage——I mean about Mr. Hawkshaw——"

"Nothing, Miss—I can assure you," responded the man. "You bade me be cautious——"

"Yes, yes. But Mr. Paton himself——"

"He said nothing on the subject."

"It is well," murmured Juliana, with a feeling of relief. "By the bye, you forgot to tell me how Mr. Paton received my letter—how he looked as he read it——in fact, what impression it seemed to make upon [redacted]

"[redacted]e looked melancholy and serious," an[redacted]dman. "Indeed, I almost thought he[redacted] and when he had finished reading it, [redacted]d so long and with such deepening m[redacted]——"

"[redacted] the response he sent back, was not instan[redacted]y given?" said Juliana: "it was not abrupt—[redacted]e rude—nor impetuous——"

"No—nothing of the sort," rejoined Woodman. "And yet, Miss, to tell you the truth, it looked like a determination adopted with sorrow, but nevertheless irrevocably taken."

"Thank you, Woodman. That will do: you can retire:"—and when the man had once more quitted the room, Juliana said to herself, "After all, I do not think that Frank would say anything to do me an injury; and, as my mother has expressed it, his being with Mr. Gunthorpe is but a coincidence—a mere coincidence, which need not trouble me."

But still Juliana *did* feel uneasy. Vague misgivings continued to float in her mind; and presentiments of coming evil diffused their cold fears throughout her entire being. The more she pondered, too, on the colossal magnitude of that cheat she was about to impose upon Mr. Hawkshaw, the less confident did she feel of being enabled to carry it out successfully. And now, likewise, she began to reflect that during the last fortnight there had been something occasionally strange in the Squire's manner—that his endearments had been forced—that he had at times fixed upon her a peculiar look—that more than once he had seemed abstracted, not immediately answering the observations she was making at the moment—and that on other occasions, when they were walking in the garden or the grounds, he had turned towards her with such an abruptness that, had he been a stranger, she would have thought his intention was to deal her a sudden blow. None of these little circumstances had dwelt particularly in her memory at the time; and as they had been invariably succeeded by a renewal of endearments on Hawkshaw's part, they were soon forgotten altogether. But now that the wedding-day was so close at hand—that vague fears and misgivings were floating in her mind—and that she stood upon the threshold of perpetrating one of the most iniquitous and abominable cheats of which a woman could be guilty,—all those little circumstances which we have hastily glanced at, came back to her memory and added to her apprehensions. Her sleep that night was therefore troubled and uneasy: but when she awoke in the morning, and the sunbeams were shining in at her window, and the birds were carolling merrily in the garden-trees, and all seemed joyous and happy without, the young lady's spirits rose; and aided by her natural strength of mind, she succeeded in putting away the gloom from her soul as easily as she put back the cloud of raven hair from the bright beauty of her face. Again was she endowed with all her fortitude for a resolute perseverance in wrong-doing. She chided herself for having given way to those misgivings and presentiments of the previous evening: and she attributed to her fancy all those little peculiarities in Hawkshaw's manner which had swept like a cloud of ominous birds through the gloom of her mind.

"To-morrow is the wedding-day," she said to herself, as she looked forth from the window. "To-morrow I quit this sombre old castle to become the mistress of Hawkshaw Hall! To-day I look around—and there is not a blade of grass, a handful of earth, or a leaf upon a tree, which I can call my own: to-morrow I shall look around from another casement—and far as the eye can reach, all the broad acres I shall survey, all the fields from which the rich harvest has so lately been garnered in, and all the stately trees that embellish the wide expanse of landscape—all, all will be mine,—mine as the wife of Squire Hawkshaw of the Hall!"

Thus mused Juliana to herself; and throughout the remainder of that day no more unpleasant thoughts troubled her soul. Night came—"the last night," she said to herself, "that she was to pass beneath the roof of Saxondale Castle:" and if she did not close her eyes speedily in slumber, it was not because her mind was again agitated and restless—it was because she lay pondering upon the many things she should do in the new phase of existence upon which she was about to enter. When she did sleep, her dreams partook of the roseate tinge of the waking thoughts which had preceded them; and as the morning sunbeams poured their effulgence into her chamber, she awoke with happiness still in her heart. Even Frank was scarcely regretted on this morning—the morning of the wedding-day!

Having dressed herself, with the assistance of her maid, in an elegant *deshabillée*, Juliana descended to the breakfast-parlour, where Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold were already seated at table. Her ladyship looked pale; and though her demeanour was calm and composed as usual, yet the quick eye of Juliana could discern that her mother's countenance was not a faithful reflex of the condition of her mind. Had Lady Saxondale any misgiving floating there? or was she secretly chagrined at losing the independence of her widowed life by the contemplated marriage into which she was more or less forced? or was it, after all, the natural excitement only, which every woman must feel on the morning of a wedding-day? No doubt all of these had something to do with the inward fluttering which her ladyship in reality experienced—although perhaps the last-mentioned cause was the least potent or active of the three.

And what of Lord Harold Staunton? His demeanour had suddenly changed. Instead of being pale, absent, thoughtful, and abstracted, as he had for some time past appeared—he had a colour upon his cheeks, and there was a strange, almost a wild exuberance of spirits marking his speech and his looks. He laughed—he told witty anecdotes—he uttered lively jests—he rubbed his hands gleefully—and as he partook of the morning meal, he declared a dozen times that he never felt better in health or had a keener appetite in all his life. But here also the penetrating looks of Juliana discerned all that was unnatural and hollow in this mirth and in these boisterous spirits on the part of the young nobleman; and it was indeed to her a matter of mystery and wonder wherefore he should in reality be depressed, and why he should deem it necessary to assume a happiness which he felt not. Surely he need not marry Lady Saxondale unless he chose? At least so thought Juliana: and thus far she was right enough. But though she knew many things concerning her mother, she nevertheless entertained not the slightest suspicion of the existence of a certain terrible tie which bound as it were the destinies of that mother and of that young nobleman, the one to the other!

The breakfast was over: it was an early one—for was there not a second, even the marriage-feast itself, to be partaken of after the nuptial ceremonies? It was now only half-past nine o'clock; and at least two hours would elapse ere the arrival of the other bridegroom, the clergyman, and the few guests who had been invited. But then there were the wedding-garments to put on: and while Juliana retired on the one hand to her own chamber, Lady Saxondale on the other withdrew to her's—while Lord Harold went out to stroll for an hour ere he began the process of his own toilet. But at half-past eleven they were all three re-assembled in the drawing room; and all three were apparelled in a befitting manner for the nuptial ceremonies. Doubtless many of our lady-readers would like us to enter into a minute description of the wedding-dresses: but we confess our inability. Suffice it to say that they were of the richest, most tasteful, and most elegant kind; and that both mother and daughter looked grandly handsome. But was it not a hideous mockery for Juliana Farefield to appear in that virgin garb?—she whose purity had been already sacrificed on the altar of lustful passion!

Soon after Lady Saxondale, Juliana, and Lord Harold Staunton,—who, we should observe, was apparelled with exquisite taste, and still continued in that strange unnatural flow of spirits,—were assembled in the drawing-room at half-past eleven, Mr. Denison's carriage arrived at the Castle. This gentleman, accompanied by his wife, his eldest son, and his daughter-in-law, alighted from the vehicle. Scarcely had they been escorted up to the drawing-room, when Lord Blackwater and Sir John Knightley also arrived. A third carriage brought four young ladies who were to assist as bridesmaids to Lady Saxondale and Juliana. These were four sisters, and were the cousins of the younger Mrs. Denison. Shortly after their arrival, the clergyman who was to officiate at the two-fold ceremony, made his appearance; and last of all—though not least of importance—came Mr. Hawkshaw. By a quarter to twelve the whole company were thus assembled in the drawing-room. The demeanour of Mr. Denison towards Juliana was precisely the same as if he were totally unacquainted with anything to her disparagement: but whatever constraint he had thus to put upon his feelings, the violence thereof was much mitigated by the circumstance that it was only necessary to address a few complimentary words to her on first entering the apartment, as Mr. Hawkshaw soon appeared and became immediately engrossed in the attentions which he had to pay to his intended bride.

Though all were thus assembled a quarter of an hour before noon, the ceremony was not instantaneously proceeded with, inasmuch as the clergyman thought it consistent with propriety and delicacy to wait for the precise moment that had been originally appointed. And even if such had not been his view and feeling in the matter, another reason would have produced the same result; and this was advanced by Mr. Hawkshaw.

Addressing himself to Lady Saxondale as the hostess of the castle, he said, "I have to apologise to your ladyship for a liberty which I have taken——"

"Mr. Hawkshaw," observed Lady Saxondale, with the blandest and most gracious smile, "is incapable of taking a liberty; and whatever he may have done, needs not this apologetic preface. I presume, my dear sir, that you have invited some friend to be present on the occasion?"

"Your ladyship has divined the exact truth," answered the Squire, bowing his acknowledgments for the urbanity of her speech. "I have indeed taken this liberty. My friend will be here at noon punctually; and it will afford me the utmost gratification to introduce him to your ladyship and the company assembled."

"It will afford us equal pleasure to receive him," rejoined Lady Saxondale.

Again Mr. Hawkshaw bowed, and then retreated to his chair by the side of Juliana's.

"And pray, my dear George," she said in a tender whisper, accompanied too with a still more tender look, "who is this friend that you expect?"

But before Mr. Hawkshaw could give any answer, the clergyman,—who was a very important personage in his own estimation—one of those fussy kind of gentlemen who like to see everything done in a regular business-like fashion, and who are as averse to delays as they are slow to push on the

march of events,—accosted the Squire; and clutching him by the arm, said, "My dear Hawkshaw, I hope your friend will not keep us waiting? You know how punctual I am: it now wants five minutes to twelve."

"You can go and put on your robes, my dear sir," responded the Squire: "for I will guarantee that as the clock strikes twelve, the friend whom I expect will be here."

"Good and well," said the clergyman: and with a very important air he issued forth from the room.

"In a few minutes, my dear Juliana," whispered the Squire, "our hands will be united. Tell me—do you feel as I do upon this happy and solemn occasion?"

"Do the epithets you have used typify your feelings, my dear George?" inquired the young lady, with another tender look. "Yes—I am indeed happy: how can I be otherwise? But you have not told me who——"

"And is your mother happy likewise?" asked Hawkshaw. "But no doubt of it! Who knows but that she is even happier than yourself?"

"Happier than I?" whispered Juliana, thinking the remark singular: but when she saw that the Squire's countenance expressed only its wonted frankness of good-humour, she smiled, observing, "What could be the meaning of that remark you have just made?"

"Simply this, my dear girl—that your mother has passed through the same ceremony before."

"Ah! I comprehend," observed Juliana, laughing. "But you have not as yet told me who it is you expect."

"And so you really experience a happiness without alloy?" quickly resumed the Squire, who appeared not to notice that renewal of a question which still remained unanswered. "Is it not the most important occasion of one's life?"

"Yes: and hence that certain degree of solemnity," replied Juliana, "which mingles with the happiness of one's thoughts."

"Chastening that happiness without subduing it," added Hawkshaw.

At this moment the clergyman re-entered the room, dressed in his canonicals; and glancing quickly around, he perceived no addition to the company whom he had left when he went forth a few minutes back. Advancing straight up to the Squire, he said, "Your friend is not come yet, Hawkshaw."

"Nor have you told me," said Juliana, "who he is."

But ere the Squire had time to utter a syllable of response to either of the remarks thus addressed to him, the clock over the entrance of the castle began to proclaim the hour of noon—the door of the apartment was thrown wide open—and the footman announced in a loud voice, "The Marquis of Eagledean!"

CHAPTER CV.

THE RESULT.

THE reader may conceive far more easily than we can possibly describe the effect produced upon Lady Saxondale, Juliana, and Lord Harold Staunton, when in the nobleman who was thus ushered into their presence, they recognised Mr. Gunthorpe. The mother and daughter felt a vague terror seize upon them, shooting through them indeed like an excruciating pang: but Lord Harold was struck with downright dismay. All the indignities which his uncle had sustained at his hand when he had fancied him to be plain Mr. Gunthorpe, rushed to his mind; and he was paralysed,—rendered motionless as a statue!

Mr. Denison, starting up from his chair, rushed forward to seize the hand of the Marquis; and those two old friends exchanged warm but rapid greetings. Mr. Hawkshaw, without throwing a single look upon Juliana, likewise rose from his seat; and Mr. Denison at once introduced him to Lord Eagledean. There were then more claspings of hands: but from the circumstance of this introduction, it became clearly apparent to the lookers-on, that if the Marquis was really the friend whom Mr. Hawkshaw expected, they were at all events strangers to each other until now.

Mrs. Denison the elder, her son, and her daughter-in-law, had been admitted into the secret of all this; and they now exchanged significant looks. But the four bridemaids, Lord Blackwater, and Sir John Knightley, as well as the clergyman, were almost completely at a loss to understand why the appearance of the Marquis could be so very far from agreeable to Lady Saxondale, Juliana, and Lord Harold, as it evidently was. Of course they knew that Lord Harold was that nobleman's nephew: but they could scarcely conceive that such a marriage had been resolved upon without the consent of the Marquis. The only explanation they could possibly fall upon in the way of conjecture, was that the facts were the reverse—that the Marquis had *not* been previously informed of the engagement—that he did not approve of it—and that he came to prevent it. But then, why should Hawkshaw, her ladyship's intended son-in-law, have played such a seemingly perfidious part in reference to this expected guest whom he himself confessed to have invited?

Lord Harold Staunton, quickly recovering his presence of mind, and resolving to put a good face upon the matter, now hastened up to his uncle, when the greetings between that nobleman, Denison, and Hawkshaw, were over; and he made a movement as if to embrace his relative. But the Marquis, bending upon him a stern look, said, "Before I receive you to my arms, Harold, I must know whether it be as a dutiful and obedient nephew that I am to welcome you—or whether you will persevere in your own course, despite whatsoever counsel or commands I may give?"

Lord Harold was taken completely aback by this mode of address: his effrontery suddenly abandoned him—and he stood still, gazing in speechless bewilderment upon the Marquis; so that the scene was rapidly deepening in interest to all the lookers-on.

Meanwhile a sudden idea had flashed to the brain of Juliana—that brain which during the first moments after the appearance of Lord Eagledean, was racked with the most excruciating tortures. Gliding from her seat to the spot where Lady Saxondale had stood up from her own when the door was first

flung open, she whispered with nervous excitement in her mother's ear, "I understand it all! The Patons—brother and sister—are the children of this Marquis! It is self-evident! If he means mischief, it is for *you* to strike him dumb!"

Lady Saxondale gave her daughter a quick glance of intelligence; and now finding it necessary to take some decisive step, she assumed an air of dignified affability—advanced towards the Marquis—and said, "My lord, as the friend of Mr. Denison and of Mr. Hawkshaw, you are welcome at Saxondale Castle."

The Marquis of Eagledean bowed with cold dignity. Mr. Denison and Hawshaw had retreated somewhat when they beheld her ladyship approaching; and she, sweeping round her eyes to convince herself that the opportunity was favourable, suddenly bent forward and whispered in a hurried manner, "The reputation of your daughter Elizabeth is in my hands!"

No doubt the Marquis of Eagledean was fully prepared for some such threat as this, because he well knew—too well knew that Lady Saxondale was aware of Elizabeth Paton's antecedents;—and therefore he was not taken aback—he showed no sign of annoyance. Not a muscle of his countenance moved: indeed his demeanour continued so coldly reserved, so chillingly dignified, that Lady Saxondale fancied the arrow had not struck home, and that Juliana's surmise in respect to the Patons being the children of the Marquis was an erroneous one. Terror seized upon her: her guilty conscience suddenly raised up all her crimes to pass in rapid array before her mental vision. And what if the Marquis of Eagledean had become acquainted with any of these? what if he knew more than the *one* circumstance concerning which he had previously threatened her: namely, her affair with William Deveril? In short, Lady Saxondale, perceiving how calmly and unconcernedly the Marquis of Eagledean received the menace which she had thrown out in respect to Elizabeth Paton, was seized with the direst apprehension. On no occasion did her fortitude so completely abandon her all in an instant. Throwing a look of earnest appeal upon the Marquis, she said, "My lord, perhaps in consideration of the alliance about to take place between your lordship's nephew and my humble self, it would please you to have some private discourse with me——Perhaps your lordship has come for that purpose——In short, it would be better for us to retire to another room for a few minutes."

"No, Lady Saxondale—not immediately," replied the Marquis, with the air and in the voice of one who seemed to feel that he had both the power and the right to speak with authority. "Permit me, however, to sit next to your ladyship for a little while; and then, when the time comes, we may have some private conversation together."

With these words the Marquis of Eagledean offered Lady Saxondale his hand, and conducted her to an ottoman at the farther extremity of the spacious drawing-room; where, placing himself by her side, he hastily whispered in a manner audible to themselves alone, "You would do well, Lady Saxondale, to follow my bidding on the present occasion."

Her ladyship felt a cold tremor sweep through her entire form, as her guilty conscience again marshalled all her crimes in grim array before her mental vision; and she knew not with how many details of that dark and damning catalogue the Marquis might be acquainted. So she said not a word: but he read in her looks that the proud and haughty woman was completely subdued, and that she was pliant and ductile to his will. We should observe that the spot to which he had conducted her, and where they were thus seated together, was the farthest removed from the assembled company; so that whatever he might now say to her, stood no chance of being overheard by any others present.

Meanwhile Lord Harold Staunton, not knowing how to act or what to think, had retired apart from the rest; and seating himself in a window-recess, folded his arms—endeavoured to appear calm and unconcerned—but was evidently much troubled in his mind. For *he* too had a guilty conscience: *he* too was tortured with fears lest his uncle should have obtained a clue to the full measure of his turpitude; and if for a moment the idea again struck him of putting on a bold countenance and assuming an air of bravado, his heart failed him—he could not do it—he was cowed, dismayed, overawed. And now, therefore, all that cheerfulness of spirits which had seemed to inspire him in the morning—an unnatural cheerfulness, the forced effort of a peculiarly morbid state of mind—gave way and yielded to despondency, suspense, and alarm.

After Juliana had accosted her mother in the manner above described, and had whispered that rapid hint in her ear, she returned to her seat: but Mr. Hawkshaw did not resume his place by her side. She saw her mother approach the Marquis of Eagledean—she beheld her ladyship seize an opportunity to whisper something to that nobleman—she could guess what it was, she herself having furnished the hint—and she was thoroughly disconcerted on perceiving how lost it seemed to be upon the Marquis. Then she observed the sudden change which came over Lady Saxondale; and she saw that her mother was afraid. As the Marquis led her ladyship to the farther extremity of the room, Juliana followed them with her eyes: she could scarcely comprehend what all this meant; and presentiments of coming evil once more took possession of her soul. She glanced towards Hawkshaw: he was now conversing in hurried whispers with Mr. Denison; and there was something in both their countenances but little calculated to reassure Juliana or cheer her spirits. She had never seen Hawkshaw look as he now did: she had never seen such an expression of dark implacability and inexorable sternness upon that countenance whose aspect was habitually of such open-hearted and good-humoured frankness. In a word, she now apprehended everything terrible—exposure, disgrace, and ruin: she would have sprung from her seat and quitted the room, but she had not the power;—she was transfixed there—the consternation which was now upon her was of paralysing influence—her limbs felt as if turned into marble.

It has taken us a considerable time to give all these explanations; but in reality only a few minutes had as yet elapsed since the Marquis of Eagledean was so suddenly announced. The lookers-on were still for the most part lost in bewilderment: but it was evident enough that there was a storm-cloud which was about to burst. The clergyman, feeling himself somewhat awkward—being in full canonicals, and all signs of the in-

traded marriage-rites having as it were suddenly died away—was resolved to bring the present uncertain aspect of things to an issue, if possible; and approaching Mr. Hawkshaw, he said, "You perceive that I am in readiness to commence the ceremony."

"Ah!" ejaculated the Squire; and a very strange expression passed over his countenance. "You would wed me to Miss Farefield—is it not so?"

Those who understood nothing of the undercurrent of that new turn which the proceedings seemed to have taken since the entrance of the Marquis of Eagledean, were naturally astonished at what appeared to be so extraordinary an observation on the part of the Squire: but Juliana was smitten with a more terrible dismay, if possible, than that which had already seized upon her.

"Ladies and gentlemen," continued Mr. Hawkshaw, placing himself in the middle of the room, "I must crave your attention for a few minutes. When an honest man gives his heart to a young lady—and when he likewise proffers her his hand—purposing to bestow upon her the unsullied name which descended to him from his forefathers, as well as a share in all he possesses,—it is but right and just to suppose that he will be met in the same frank and generous confidence by the young lady herself. If she be aware of any impediment which in a moral, if not a legal point of view, should prevent her from responding in the affirmative to her suitor's proposal, should she not honourably decline it, even though she were to keep the reason closely locked up in her own heart? But what will you think, ladies and gentlemen, of a young lady, who, loving another—who, having given her heart to that other—and more, who having surrendered up her purity to that other—should nevertheless consent to become the wife of this honest and confiding man who loved her so faithfully but so blindly!"

Mr. Hawkshaw paused; and there was an indescribable sensation pervading the apartment. Juliana herself was almost annihilated. She sank back, covered with shame—filled with confusion—devoured with feelings which defy all description. She would have given worlds to be enabled to fly from the apartment; but she could not. Such was the state of her mind that she was as powerless and helpless as if physically a statue.

"This is too much—too much," said Lady Saxondale, who felt that the exposure of her daughter's shame would to a certain extent redound upon herself: and forgetting for an instant all her own sources of terror, she was about to spring up from the ottoman and rush forward to do something——anything——though she knew not what——to put an end to this most painful scene: but she felt herself held back.

"Your ladyship must remain here," said the Marquis in a low tone: but he spoke and he looked in a manner which rendered her again fearfully alive to the perils, whether real or imaginary, of her own position: so she sank back with confusion in her brain, terror in her soul, and torture in every nerve.

"Ladies and gentlemen," resumed Mr. Hawkshaw, in accents more implacable than those which he had hitherto used, "this is no common case, and and therefore I am taking no common course to expose it. It was sought to make me a dupe—to deceive me most grossly—to render this marriage a cloak for the most shameful profligacy—to turn the name of *husband* into a convenience to shield the part which it was hoped a paramour would play! Juliana Farefield," continued Hawkshaw, speaking in a voice of thunder, "I accuse *you* of all this! I will not mention that other name, unless you yourself choose to parade it: but I will tell you that I heard all that took place in the conservatory at my friend Denison's house. I saw upon what a precipice I stood—rage filled my heart—a feeling sprang up within me, which I had never known before: it was a craving for revenge! Ah, *then* I mastered my emotions, or at least the outward expression of them: for my resolve was promptly and suddenly taken. In a word, I determined to see how you would act—to continue with you as if I knew nothing—to see if remorse would smite you—and then to proceed accordingly. No: you have experienced not remorse—you would this day have given me your polluted hand: and hence this vengeance—hence this exposure! It is terrible, I know: but it is not more than you deserve. Had you been less guilty, it would seem an unmanly and a cowardly part which I am now performing. But you had no pity for me: you would have become my wife with the pre-conceived and deliberate intention of violating your marriage-vows: you are not a woman—you deserve not the consideration usually given to your sex: you are a fiend in female shape—and it is thus you are treated!"

There was a terrible energy in Hawkshaw's words; and the sensation they created, as the reader may suppose, was immense. But scarcely had he finished this speech—scarcely had the sounds of his crushingly denunciatory language died away—when a cry burst from Juliana's lips. She could endure it no longer—she was becoming mad: and springing from her seat, she bounded to the door. But Mr. Hawkshaw, still merciless and implacable, was by her side in a moment; and catching her by the wrist, he thundered forth, "Come forward, infamous creature! You have yet another ordeal to pass through! Your punishment is not complete! Remain, while I read a letter which was addressed to you by him whom you sought to retain as a paramour while taking me as a husband. This letter was written in the presence of Mr. Denison,—and it confirms all that I have said!"

"No, no!" shrieked forth Juliana: "I will not—I cannot. Kill me if you choose—but spare me a farther infliction!"

There was a wild agony in her accents—a piteous anguish in her looks—which moved the hearts of some present to compassion; and a murmur arose, which, without definite expression, nevertheless intelligibly conveyed an opinion that the Squire was sufficiently avenged.

"Well, then," he said, disdainfully tossing away from him the arm which he had grasped violently and had held firmly: "begone! Perhaps it were best for the sake of these ladies here, that you should relieve them of your polluted presence!"

But the door had closed behind Juliana even before the indignant and excited Hawkshaw had finished his sentence.

"My lord," said Lady Saxondale, in a low voice, but replete with ineffable anguish, "my daughter

will commit suicide—she will destroy herself—permit me to hasten to her—I conjure you!"

"Yes, speed after her," replied the Marquis of Eagledean, smitten with the truth of Lady Saxondale's apprehension; and in another moment she also had disappeared from the apartment.

But let it be understood that though she certainly thought it quite probable that Juliana would be driven to self-destruction by the tremendous exposure which had just taken place, it was not this that had distressed her: she had caught at the pretext in order to escape from a room where her own position had become perfectly intolerable.

"Ladies and gentlemen," resumed Mr. Hawkshaw, "it pains me to occupy your time in such a manner; but for my own justification must I read this letter,—suppressing only the signature that is appended to it. For I feel that the course I have taken is indeed so extraordinary and of such an extreme character, that if one single tittle of the accusations made by me against Juliana Farefield could be disproved—or, on the other hand, could not be supported by evidence—I should deserve to be branded as an unmanly coward—as a mean and paltry dastard. I beseech your attention, therefore, for a few minutes—only a few minutes."

He stopped short. A dead silence reigned—but curiosity was depicted on the countenance of almost everybody present; and therefore Mr. Hawkshaw proceeded to read aloud the letter which he drew forth from his pocket, and the contents of which were as follow:—

"JULIANA,—Everything is completely at an end between us. It is impossible that I can look upon your conduct otherwise than with horror and aversion. You have mistaken me: I am not so depraved as yourself. On the contrary, I thank God I possess feelings honourable enough and sentiments generous enough to save me from connivance in the detestable cheat which you proposed to practise towards a confiding gentleman. Deeply do I deplore the weakness of which I myself have been guilty, but into which you beguiled me. I understand you now, all too well! Never did I deem it possible that a young lady of high intelligence, excellent education, and with every faculty to appreciate the difference between right and wrong, could become so utterly depraved and so deeply profligate as you have shown yourself to be. I am shocked when I think that when you had once revealed your true nature, I could have been weak or insensate enough to throw myself in your way again. What! you dared insult me with the proposal that when you were married to another, I should become your pensioned paramour? you dared insult me with a proposition which by the mere fact of its being made, proved that you thought me as vile and infamous as yourself? No, Juliana—I am not. I have awakened from a dream. I tear your image from my heart—but only to trample it under foot—to tread it down deep in the mire as that of a polluted and loathsome creature!"

Thus ended the letter, save and except the signature, which Mr. Hawkshaw suppressed. Again did a profound silence prevail. The bridesmaids exchanged looks of mingled wonder and stupefaction: Lord Blackwater and Sir John Knightley gazed on each other as if to ask whether it were not all a dream: the clergyman stalked out of the room, in cold and offended dignity, to put off his canonicals. The Denisons rose with the evident intention of taking a prompt departure. Lord Harold Staunton, to whom all Juliana's wickedness was as new and as startling as to most others present, sat confounded,—forgetting everything except the monstrous revelations he had just heard. As for the Marquis of Eagledean, he likewise remained seated on the ottoman at a distance, and appeared to be wrapped up in profound and mournful reflection. Such too was the case: for he thought with deep sorrow of his daughter's past career, which had enabled Lady Saxondale to throw out that menace at him,—and he likewise pondered with regret upon the amour of his son with Juliana Farefield.

Suddenly arousing himself from this reverie, the Marquis of Eagledean rose from his seat—walked straight up to Lord Harold Staunton—and placing his hand upon his shoulder, said in a low but authoritative voice, "Nephew, follow me."

The young nobleman started, and for an instant looked vacantly up at his uncle; for it appeared to him a dream that the Mr. Gunthorpe, whom he had plundered and insulted, should be really and truly identical with the Marquis of Eagledean. But being thus recalled to the full consciousness of those circumstances by which he was surrounded, he rose from his seat, and followed his lordship from the room. When they were on the landing outside, the Marquis said, "You are better acquainted, Harold, with the interior of Saxondale Castle than I am; lead the way to some apartment where we may converse without fear of interruption."

"Will you come to my own chamber?" asked Lord Harold: and on the Marquis nodding an assent, he led the way thither.

CHAPTER CVI.

THE UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

THE uncle and nephew were now alone together. The former was cold and severe: the latter pale, and full of vague apprehension. The Marquis seated himself at the table in the middle of the room; and pointing to another chair, bade his nephew be seated likewise. Then there was a pause of a few moments, during which the old nobleman seemed to be preparing himself for the manner in which he should enter upon the business he had in hand.

"Nephew," he at length said, "the time is come when I may give you a few explanations relative to the course I have hitherto been adopting towards you. It came to my knowledge, while in Italy, that you were leading a life of which I could but little approve; and I also learnt that your sister Florina was engaged to be married to a young man whose only nobility consisted in his title, but whose character and conduct were very far from estimable. I will not, however, pretend that these were the only motives which made me resolve to visit England: but certain it is that they had their weight in leading me to this determination. In short, Harold, one of my purposes was to come and ascertain for myself the truth of those reports which had reached me in respect to your own conduct and the character of Florina's intended husband. Full well, alas! did I know that my personal appearance, during the lapse of years and a long absence from my native land, had become so changed that those who had formerly known me would not recognise me again. Assuming the character of an intimate friend of the Marquis of Eagledean, I gave to myself the repute

LADY SAXONDALE
WHT
W.WILLIAMS

of a rich banker, the better to avert all suspicion of my real identity, and at the same time to command a certain degree of respect. You remember, Harold, my first appearance before you in the box at the Opera. Accident had led me to the theatre at the same time that you were there with your sister and Lord Saxondale. While I was seated in the pit, you were pointed out to me; and I thought it an excellent opportunity to introduce myself. I had letters in my pocket-book, which I had already written in the name of the Marquis of Eagledean, as the proper passports to your acquaintance. And here I must observe that knowing that your aunt Lady Macdonald was not the best hand in the world at keeping a secret, I had resolved to preserve the *incognito* even unto her; and therefore the letter addressed to her ladyship, was in a similar strain to those intended for yourself and Florina. Well, I entered the Opera-box; and it required but a glance to convince me that Lord Saxondale was a frivolous, conceited, self-sufficient coxcomb. As for yourself, I saw that your exquisite aristocratic refinement was shocked at the idea of forming an intimacy with a queer-looking old fellow like myself. In respect to Florina, I was at once delighted with her; and I resolved that if the reports I had heard and the opinion I had already formed of her intended husband were justified by a farther acquaintance, the amiable and excellent girl should not be sacrificed to such a miserable coxcomb. A few days afterwards I dined with you. In every way was I determined to put you to the test. I purposely disputed with the driver of the cabriolet to see what impression the scene would make upon yourself and likewise upon Lord Saxondale: for with my experience of the world I have found that the true characters and dispositions of its denizens may be judged by the minutest trifles. I saw that you received me with a forced civility, while Lord Saxondale scarcely took any pains to hide his aversion and disgust. In the course of conversation I talked in a style to maintain my assumed character of a mere money-making man of business; and even in respect to my attorney I invented the most vulgar and ludicrous name as a substitute for his real one. But I need not dwell upon these details: doubtless you can recall them to memory? Suffice it to say that I soon perceived the real object for which I had been invited to dine with you. In plain terms, you wanted to make me useful—or in plainer terms still, to plunder me. I was resolved to see to what lengths you and your companion would go: for I knew full well that in the same way that you purposed to treat me, were you accustomed to treat others. I affected to be influenced by the wine which I drank: you endeavoured to ply me more and more; and still I continued to play my part. You obtained from me five thousand pounds. Perhaps you may now wonder that I thus easily parted with so large a sum, knowing that it would never be returned. But it was to me a mere trifle; and in suffering myself to be duped out of it, I acquired the certainty that my nephew and my niece's intended husband were but little better than a couple of scamps and blacklegs. You see that I speak plainly, Harold: for this is the day when truths have to be told."

The Marquis paused for a few moments. His nephew said nothing—but by his manner exhibited much humiliation, mingled with those same serious apprehensions which had all along been haunting him.

"I feared," continued the old nobleman, "that yourself and Lord Saxondale were thoroughly depraved: but still I was resolved to know more of you. I was likewise desirous to watch Florina's conduct, and ascertain whether it would confirm the favourable opinion which I had already formed of her. But on mature reflection, I determined not to visit Lady Macdonald immediately. I was fearful that she might possibly recognise me; and I did not choose to risk losing my *incognito* until the proper time should arrive for declaring myself. I accordingly wrote to her ladyship to the effect that certain occupations which I had in hand, compelled me to resign for the present the advantages I should have otherwise been rejoiced to reap from Lord Eagledean's letters of introduction. In order to carry out my views with regard to yourself—to watch you thoroughly—to probe your heart to its very centre—to comprehend your disposition fully—I determined to adopt some means of espying your actions. I was desirous to ascertain whether all good feelings and all good principles were utterly destroyed within you; or whether they merely lay dormant and were susceptible of resuscitation. In a word, I was anxious to discover whether you were inveterate in depravity—irredeemably plunged in profligacy; or whether under genial influences you might be reformed. I bethought me of your valet Alfred. I remembered how insolently supercilious was his manner when he witnessed the dispute which I purposely got up with the cab-driver, and how cringingly fawning did he subsequently become when on leaving your lodgings I placed gold in his hand. I know the world, Harold; and I saw therefore that your domestic was the individual suited to my purpose. I sought an opportunity of waylaying him; and without revealing who I really was, I explained enough of my views to make him comprehend what I required. I lavished gold upon him: and he became my creature. Such a fellow as that, Harold, would sell his very soul to Satan: he is one of that rapacious and bribeable class that for thirty pieces of silver would enact the part of Judas Iscariot all over again if an opportunity served. Well, he became my spy—yes, the spy that I set upon your actions. Then I obtained a still farther insight into your character: but upon these particulars it is not now my purpose to dwell. It was through him that I received intelligence of the contemplated duel between yourself and Mr. Deveril. I need not remind you how I appeared upon the ground in the hope of preventing it, or under what circumstances my design was frustrated. You doubtless know that I am the friend of William Deveril—one of the most excellent young men that ever resisted the temptations of this world and maintained an almost fabulous purity of conduct and immaculate virtue. I knew from the very first that the accusation levelled against him by Lady Saxondale was the foulest of calumnies: I soon obtained the evidence that it was so,—an evidence afforded by the rancorous spite and murderous projects of that bad woman towards him. You made a confidant of your valet Alfred in respect to all the circumstances of the masquerade and the origin of the duel; and Alfred duly informed me thereof. I obtained from him a written statement of all

those circumstances; and I threatened Lady Saxondale with law-proceedings on behalf Mr. Deveril. But while seeking—and indeed resolving, to clear up his reputation wheresoever it had been defamed, I did not wish to create a great scandal. Not that I had any pity for Lady Saxondale: but as your name was so closely mixed up in all those vile proceedings, it was for *your* sake that I endeavoured to bring her ladyship to terms which should produce a result answering every purpose in respect to Mr. Deveril, and without compromising you. Many circumstances have transpired to engage my time, to direct my attention elsewhere, and to divert my thoughts into other channels; and thus there has been a delay in bringing this matter to as prompt an issue as I originally intended. You came down into Lincolnshire to stay at the Castle: your aunt and your sister accompanied you. But I was resolved that Florina should not long remain in the contaminating society of Lady Saxondale. And here I must inform you that Mr. Deveril has for some time entertained the sincerest and most honourable affection for Florina: but this secret I knew not until after the duel. Then I determined to make him the means of opening Florina's eyes to the true character of Lady Saxondale; and I despatched him into Lincolnshire for the purpose. He came provided with that document which bore the signature of your valet Alfred——"

"And Florina and my aunt," said Lord Harold, in a deep voice, "are therefore acquainted with all the circumstances of that duel?"

"They are," replied the Marquis.

"Go on, my lord—go on, uncle!" said Harold, in nervous trepidation: for he was suffering the acutest suspense as to what *else* the Marquis might have learnt, and whether the worst that had come to his lordship's knowledge was yet told.

"After Deveril's return from Lincolnshire," continued the Marquis, "I wrote to Lady Macdonald, enjoining her to hasten back to London, alleging that I had most important communications to make to her on the part of the Marquis of Eagledean: for as yet she knew nothing of all that Deveril had told Florina. They did return to London; and then I lost no time in calling upon her ladyship. I saw her alone—I revealed myself to her—and it was at once decided between us that Lord Saxondale should receive his dismissal as Florina's suitor. Nay, more—I acquainted her with William Deveril's affection for that excellent girl; and it was likewise determined that their mutual love should not be thwarted. Subsequently Florina learnt who I really was—William Deveril likewise; and they therefore knew that I had the power and the means as well as the inclination to ensure their happiness."

Again did the Marquis of Eagledean pause for a few moments, to see whether his nephew would offer any comment upon all he had been saying: but Harold said nothing. He was still enduring the acutest suspense: he was anxious for his uncle to continue; and yet he was fearful of urging him to do so, lest he might betray his apprehensions.

"With regard to yourself, Harold," resumed Lord Eagledean, "I was somewhat at a loss how to act. From the circumstances of the masquerade and the duel, and from the fact that you remained with Lady Saxondale here at the Castle, I felt convinced that you were infatuated with this woman—that her charms and fascinations had woven a web about your heart—that you were ensnared in her meshes—and that you had surrendered yourself up completely to her Circean wiles. I knew therefore how difficult it would be to wean you away from such a woman——"

"Oh! wherefore did you not make the attempt?" suddenly ejaculated Lord Harold, as the thought struck him that if such had been done he might have been saved from *something* which lay like a weight of lead upon his soul, and was the source of those dire apprehensions which for an hour past had been racking and torturing him.

"Would you really have abandoned her?" asked his uncle, with the animation of hope and satisfaction upon his countenance.

"Yes—I would, I would!" rejoined Harold, with nervous vehemence: and he scarcely knew what he was saying. "But pray proceed—I conjure you to proceed!"

"Had I known, Harold," continued the Marquis, "that you were less infatuated with that woman than I imagined you to be, I should have at once sought to wean you from her. But I feared that you would have little respect for the wishes or remonstrances of an old uncle whom you might so easily set at defiance because you were certain of sooner or later succeeding to his title and estates, from neither of which he could debar you at his death. However, we will not dwell one moment longer than is necessary upon the present painful topics of discourse. Believing you to be thoroughly infatuated with Lady Saxondale, I anxiously sought for whatsoever evidence circumstances might throw in my way, to be enabled to tear the mask from her countenance, and reveal her true character in such a light as to make you recoil from it. But every time I was in hopes that such evidence would fall into my hands, I was disappointed."

The reader will comprehend that the Marquis here alluded to the assistance which he expected to receive from Chiffin,—first on the occasion when he and Deveril went down into Lincolnshire, and when the double murder on the bank of the river frustrated their views by compelling them at once to separate from the Cannibal; and on that other occasion when they were decoyed to Solomon Patch's boosing-ken, and were saved from death by the intervention of Madge Somers.

"Thus disappointed," continued Lord Eagledean, "I was uncertain how to act—when I received the intelligence that you were actually about to become the husband of Lady Saxondale. This I learnt by a letter from Mr. Denison, who is a very old friend of mine. At the same time I was informed that Miss Farefield had named the day of her mother's nuptials with yourself, as that on which she would bestow her own hand upon Mr. Hawkshaw. But Mr. Hawkshaw had discovered the infamy of Juliana's character, and was panting for vengeance. He and Mr. Denison were acting in concert; and thus I learnt all that was to take place. Then it occurred to me that I would be present at the exposure of the daughter, whose shame, to a certain extent redounding on the mother, would perhaps afford me a favourable opportunity to accomplish my aims and rescue you. At all events I was resolved to make one grand effort to save you before you linked your

destiny indissolubly with that of Lady Saxondale. You now comprehend wherefore I am here this day; and it is for you, Harold, to reply whether I have come in vain."

The Marquis of Eagledean ceased; and unspeakable was the relief experienced by Lord Harold Staunton when he found that the *one* tremendous topic which was uppermost in his own thoughts, and was the source of all his apprehensions, had not been touched upon by his uncle. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses: an enormous weight was lifted from his mind; and though the consciousness of guilt was still *there*, yet the fear of its exposure had suddenly passed away. Now therefore he had breathing time to turn his reflections into another channel. Assuredly, after the terrific scene which had ere now taken place in the drawing-room, he no longer wished to become the husband of Lady Saxondale. He knew that she would never again dare show her face in society after the exposure of her daughter's shame; and he also comprehended full well that the Marquis himself intended to wring from her ladyship a complete contradiction of the calumny uttered against Deveril. Thus, in all respects, would Lady Saxondale's reputation be ruined in the world; and Harold coveted not such a wife as that. Moreover, he judged from the altered tone and manner which his uncle had exhibited towards him during the latter portion of his explanations, that he would provide handsomely for him in a pecuniary sense, if he only displayed contrition for the past and gave solemn assurances for reform. Now, be it understood, that Harold had never loved Lady Saxondale: he had only been dazzled by her magnificent beauty—his passion had been excited by her gorgeous charms; and after he had once possessed her, he had rarely thought of her otherwise than as the means of giving him a good social position, with the enjoyment of ample wealth. It therefore required no sacrifice of feeling on his part to surrender her up altogether now. As for contrition, this was easily affected: as for assurances of reform, these were as readily to be given:—and for every possible consideration did he deem it expedient to adopt a deferential and conciliatory demeanour towards his uncle.

"Make no professions now, Harold," said the Marquis, cutting him short when he began to speak in the sense to which he had made up his mind. "I have already told you that I am well experienced in the world—and this experience teaches me that young men do not reform themselves all in an instant. It is sufficient for me on the present occasion to learn that you are willing to abandon the polluted society of Lady Saxondale, and leave yourself in my hands. I have a post-chaise waiting hard by: it is my purpose to depart hence so soon as I have obtained an interview with—*that woman*," he added contemptuously; "and you will go with me. Let your preparations be promptly made; and see that you keep me not waiting when I myself am ready."

The Marquis rose from his seat, and was about to quit the chamber—when he turned back and said, "I have yet many explanations to give you, Harold, in respect to myself, and concerning many events which have occurred during the last few weeks. But all these must be postponed until after we have quitted the Castle: and during our journey to London there will be ample time for discourse. I now go to seek Lady Saxondale:—hasten you whatsoever preparations you may have to make."

With these words Lord Eagledean left the chamber; and threading his way back, along the passages and down the stairs, in the direction of the sitting-apartments of the castellated mansion, he met a man-servant whom he desired to show him into some room where Lady Saxondale would afford him a few minutes' conversation. The footman at once conducted the Marquis into the library, and then sent up a message by Lucilla to the effect that his lordship requested to see Lady Saxondale.

The Marquis of Eagledean had not been many minutes alone in the library, when her ladyship made her appearance. She had put off the bridal-dress, having foreseen from the very first instant of the old nobleman's arrival that it had become a useless mockery: she was now apparelled in plainer and simpler raiment. Her countenance was pale—her features were rigid with a forced composure: but her eyes glittered with an uneasy and restless light. Slow and deliberate was her pace as she advanced into the room; and taking her seat in silence, she seemed to await the announcement of whatsoever business the Marquis of Eagledean might have in view.

CHAPTER CVII.

THE MARQUIS AND THE LADY.

The Marquis of Eagledean felt that he had to deal with a woman of extraordinary strength of mind, and who perhaps during the interval of one hour since they had parted in the drawing-room, might have probably recovered some portion of the fortitude and effrontery she had then lost. At the same time he reflected that as he had gained a considerable vantage-ground at the outset of this day's proceedings, by the calm resoluteness of his own manner, it would not be difficult to reconquer it by the same means. From a variety of circumstances, with which the reader is acquainted, he had every reason to suspect that Lady Saxondale's conscience was very far from being a comfortable one. The worst, however, that he positively and definitely knew against her, was that murderous provocation of a duel which she had hoped would result in the fall of William Deveril. But he was aware that she had been in correspondence with Chiffin; and this could not be attributed to any good purpose. It was therefore natural to suspect that she had been guilty of other deeds beyond those which had come to his knowledge; and amongst these suspected crimes, might fairly be included the instigation of the Cannibal to prepare that pitfall at the boozing-ken. However, the Marquis was determined to do all he could to bend Lady Saxondale to the terms which he wished to impose—and, with this aim, to use not merely the facts which he had in his possession, but also the surmises and conjectures he had been led to form.

Gazing with a fixed sternness of purpose upon Lady Saxondale, he said, "Perhaps you are not at a loss to comprehend the nature of the demand which I have to make?"

"First of all," rejoined her ladyship, coldly and distantly, "you will perhaps inform me by what right you make any demand at all?"—for she was now as anxious as Lord Harold Staunton had on his part recently been, to ascertain the full extent of the Marquis of Eagledean's knowledge of past events.

"Your ladyship inquires," he said, "by what right I make a certain demand—and I reply, by the right which one wields who has another in his power."

"These are mere words, Lord Eagledean," she returned. "Will you look me in the face and tell me positively and truly that the Patons are not your children—and that it was not in consequence of all that has taken place between my daughter Juliana and Francis Paton, that you have come hither to-day?"

"I should have come hither, madam," responded Lord Eagledean, "if nothing of all that had taken place: I should have come on account of the contemplated marriage between yourself and Lord Harold Staunton."

"And I presume," observed Lady Saxondale, "that Lord Harold Staunton is infinitely rejoiced at the breaking-off of the match? Doubtless he has suddenly become a most dutiful nephew?"—and she spoke with much affected scorn and disdain; though her real object was to discover whether Lord Harold had been led to confess anything to his uncle which might compromise herself.

"If you please, Lady Saxondale, we will have no war of words—or at least," continued the Marquis, "as little of such a contention as possible. You ask me whether the Patons are my children—and I have not the slightest hesitation in telling you that they are."

"And having made this avowal," said her ladyship, "you will scarcely still insist upon any demand which you had previously resolved to make?—for you must know that with a single breath I can destroy the reputation of your daughter Elizabeth Paton."

"No, madam," rejoined the Marquis with so much seeming unconcern and cold indifference that Lady Saxondale herself was bewildered by it: "you will not dare open your lips to speak ill, whether truthfully or falsely, of a single soul in whom I am interested."

"Ah! my Lord Eagledean," she exclaimed, "this is bold language to use to me!"

"It may be so," he said: "but you are so completely in my power, that no language I may use can be too bold. Let us however cut short this controversy—for such is the air which our discourse has assumed. Lady Saxondale," continued the Marquis sternly and resolutely, "there are writing-materials close at hand: have the kindness to make use of them at once, for the purpose of drawing up a full and complete contradiction of the base calumny you propagated in respect to William Deveril."

"William Deveril!" echoed her ladyship bitterly: "always William Deveril with you! It is the old story."

"Yes: but it must now be brought to an end. Madam," added Lord Eagledean emphatically, "I am in haste to depart—I beg that you will trifle with me no longer:"—and he placed the writing-materials before her: for she had seated herself near the table on which they lay.

"And what, Lord Eagledean," she said, bending upon him a searching look, "if I positively refuse to listen to this insolent demand on your part?"

"Then, Lady Saxondale," he rejoined at once, "all I can say is that there will be an immediate explosion. In a word, I will give you into custody——"

"Custody?" she ejaculated, a ghastly expression of anguish suddenly sweeping over her countenance.

"Yes—custody," repeated the Marquis, perceiving that the arrow, aimed somewhat at random, had hit the right mark—and that the blow, experimentally dealt, had told with terrific effect.

"But, my lord," cried Lady Saxondale, not yet completely beaten, "I am at a loss to understand you."

"Do you require that I should become explicit?" he demanded, in a stern voice and with a penetrating look. "Cast your mental vision, Lady Saxondale, deep down into your heart—examine well your conscience—see if you have naught to be afraid of—reflect whether for every action of your life you could give so satisfactory an account that you would tremble not to look justice in the face. But do you wish me to be explicit, I ask? Think you, madam, that when I menaced you with law-proceedings on the behalf of Mr. Deveril, it was without good evidence to prove your iniquity? think you, madam, that I was ignorant of how the duel between my nephew and William Deveril was brought about? think you that I was ignorant of the circumstances of the masquerade? But perhaps you wish to know even still more. Madam, what answer would you give to justice if you were questioned in respect to your correspondence with an infamous character, the bare mention of whose name is fraught with horror——I mean a certain Chiffin ——Ah! I see, madam, that your conscience is not tranquil while I am thus speaking! But would you know still more? What answer are you prepared to give to the nearest magistrate if I accuse you ——yes, *you*, Lady Saxondale—of having instigated that same miscreant Chiffin to take my life and that of William Deveril? and if I affirm that in consequence of such instigation, the diabolical attempt was made but a short time back?"

Lady Saxondale looked strange indeed at this announcement, because it was the first that she had heard of that attempt. She did not however forget the hint she had thrown out to Chiffin, and the immensity of the reward she had offered; and thus, mingled with her surprise there was a guilty confusion, which notwithstanding all her effrontery, she could not possibly conceal.

"Do you wish to know more, Lady Saxondale?" continued the Marquis, perceiving full well the powerful impression his words had made: "and again I say look down into your heart——"

"No, no!" ejaculated the miserable woman, her brain whirling with terrific apprehensions: "I wish to hear no more! Lord Eagledean, you are implacable towards me—you are merciless and cruel to a degree! Wherefore do you persecute me thus? what harm have I done you?——what harm, I say, have I done you?"—and she now spoke with passionate vehemence.

"Lady Saxondale, the matter is not to be treated in this way," responded the Marquis. "Do not think it is pleasant for me to war against women: but if women forget themselves——Yet I will not, by means of reproaches, increase the bitterness of your feelings: for heaven knows they *must* be bitter enough! In a word, then, you have inflicted an injury — you must make reparation — and that speedily!"

"But if I sign this paper," said her ladyship, suddenly becoming calm, though it was with an unnatural tranquillity, "will you depart hence at once? will you leave me unmolested?"

"Give me such a document as I require," replied Lord Eagledean, "and I take myself hence without delay."

"Then be it so," rejoined Lady Saxondale: and snatching up a pen, she said, "Dictate what you will: I am prepared to write."

"Stop! I have a draught with me," said the Marquis, "*of* what is requisite to give the fullest contradiction to the calumny you propagated. Here it is:"—and he produced a paper drawn up in a legal hand—in fact, by his own attorney.

"Give it to me," said Lady Saxondale: "I will copy it. But no!"—and she drew her hand across her forehead: "I have a pain *here*. I can scarcely see the characters traced upon that paper. Read the contents, my lord—I will write to your dictation. Perhaps I can *feel* to write, if I cannot *see*."

The Marquis of Eagledean was naturally too generous-hearted not to feel some small amount of pity for this woman whose mind, as he full well perceived, was now full of strange confusion and wildering trouble. But he could not retreat—he could not spare her one single pang that it cost her to fulfil the terms that he had imposed. In a slow and measured voice, he read from the paper which he held in his hand; and she went on writing. But she scarcely knew what it was that she thus put down to his dictation: her hand moved mechanically—and it was in a kind of automaton-like manner that she guided the pen over the paper. All this while her countenance was very pale: her olive complexion gave it a tinge of ghastly sallowness;—but her eyes burnt like living coals, and felt as such in their sockets.

At length the task was completed; and flinging down the pen, Lady Saxondale merely ejaculated, "There!"

The Marquis of Eagledean took up the document which she had just finished—glanced rapidly over it —satisfied himself that it was correct — and perceived that the signature was duly affixed. He could not help observing that the writing was singularly regular, preserving all the gracefulness and beauty of a delicate female hand. Lady Saxondale gazed fixedly upon him—but yet in a strange vacant manner—as he thus examined the paper; and when he had consigned it to his pocket-book, she said, "Now, my lord, are you satisfied that I have stamped the ruin of my reputation?"

"Lady Saxondale," he replied, "you must bear in mind that you have drawn all this upon yourself. But if it be a solace to you—although you have little right indeed to expect any consolatory assurance at my hands, after having instigated a bravo to take my life——"

"But this solace—this solace that you speak of—what is it?" she demanded petulantly.

"I was about to say that it is not my purpose to blazon this document forth to the world. It will be placed in the hands of Lady Macdonald, who is acquainted with all the circle of your friends, and who can thus contradict the calumny wheresoever you spread it. This is absolutely necessary: but beyond that proceeding, no advantage will be taken of the confession you have made."

"Oh! it is most kind of you," said Lady Saxondale, with bitterest irony upon her pale quivering lip, "to proffer me such a solace as this! Pray, my lord, for whose opinion think you I care, save for that of the circle of my friends?—and *there* my reputation is to be ruined! Do not therefore make a merit of something for which I do not thank you. Perhaps you would wish me to go down upon my knees and cringingly express my gratitude that you do not placard a printed statement on every wall throughout the metropolis? But enough!" she abruptly cried, with an equally sudden recovery of an air of haughty fortitude, blended even with defiance. "You assured me that when once possessed of that document, you would take your departure."

"And I will keep my word," rejoined the Marquis: then with a bow he issued forth from the library.

Lady Saxondale was now alone. For some minutes she stood with her eyes fixed in a strange manner in the direction of the door by which Lord Eagledean had taken his departure: but she was in reality gazing upon vacancy. Her features, ghastly pale, were rigid with despair: she looked like a woman who had nothing worth living for in this world,—a woman from whose soul every earthly hope had fled, and whose only mood was a longing for self-destruction. Slowly she began to pace to and fro in that spacious library. Heaven alone can tell how great was the anguish of her thoughts, or what dark and terrible things kept trooping through her mind. However enormous her guilt — however manifold her crimes—however immense her turpitude,—there assuredly was a punishment for it all even in this world—a hell which she experienced even on this side of the grave, and the tortures of which were racking her then and there. For more than an hour did she remain by herself in the library. At the expiration of that time she rang the bell; and arming herself with as much composure as possible, awaited the entrance of the domestic in answer to that summons. In a few moments the door opened, and a footman entered.

"Has the Marquis of Eagledean taken his departure?" she asked, in a voice so cold that it appeared to the man to be strangely calm and firm.

"He has, my lady," was the response; "nearly an hour ago."

"And Lord Harold Staunton?"

"His lordship went away with the Marquis."

"How did they go?" inquired Lady Saxondale, after a brief pause.

"The Marquis of Eagledean had a post-chaise waiting the whole time that he was here," rejoined the domestic.

"And do you know," was her ladyship's next question, "in which direction they went?"

"To Lincoln, my lady," was the answer; "and

I heard the Marquis say to Mr. Denison that he and Lord Harold were going back to London with the least possible delay."

"It is well," murmured Lady Saxondale to herself. "But the Denisons?"

"They have all taken their departure, my lady. They waited until the Marquis of Eagledean had terminated his interview with your ladyship—and I heard Mr. Denison press his lordship to stay with him a few days——but——"

"The Denisons are gone, then? And the others ——Mr. Hawkshaw——and all those, I mean, who were assembled at the Castle ere now——"

"They are gone, my lady."

"That will do," responded the mistress of the mansion: and she turned away to one of the windows of the library.

The servant disappeared: Lady Saxondale was once more alone. But had any one been present to observe her now, he might have supposed that she was gazing forth upon the beautiful landscape of garden and park, grove and field, which stretched before her as far as the eye could reach; and yet she saw nothing of it at all—no, not a single feature of that fair prospect. She was once more gazing upon vacancy. For some minutes did she remain thus—and then abruptly turned away from the casement.

"At all events," she muttered to herself, "the Marquis is keeping his word: there is nothing to be apprehended. Had he purposed to deceive me—had he intended to invoke the vengeance of justice against me—he would not have taken his prompt departure for London thus. But does my resolve remain the same? Yes, yes: it does—it must. And now to see Juliana!"

Lady Saxondale went forth from the library—ascended the staircase—and proceeded to her daughter's chamber. Juliana had thrown aside—or rather torn off—the bridal-dress: it lay scattered in fragments upon the floor. She had hurried on another garment; and she was now half reclining upon a sofa in that bed-chamber, the image of blank despair. All tint of vital colouring had fled from her cheeks: her countenance was as ghastly pale as that of her mother;—or rather, with its olive complexion, it had that same shade of corpse-like sallowness. Her elbow rested upon the elevated extremity of the sofa—her hand supported her head—her hair had become disarranged in the fit of frenzied spite with which she had torn off the bridal trappings, and it flowed in dishevelled but luxuriant masses over her shoulders. She did not hear her mother enter the room; and even when Lady Saxondale stood before her, she did not seem to notice her presence. We may say of her as we have just now said of the mother herself, that she looked a being who had no farther concern with this world, save and except to escape from it as speedily as possible.

"Juliana," said Lady Saxondale, in a low cold voice, "what do you intend to do?"

"Did you speak, mother?" she asked, slowly looking up, but without otherwise altering her position on the sofa: and though her eyes were now fixed on Lady Saxondale's countenance, there was still the vacancy of blank despair in their gaze.

"Yes—I spoke, Juliana—and I asked you what you purposed to do?"

"What can I do, mother? what would you have me do? am I not lost—ruined—undone? My God, what have I suffered within the last two or three hours! And you came not near me, mother——"

"Yes: I came up to you almost immediately after you fled from the drawing-room," replied Lady Saxondale, "and when you were rending off your bridal-dress."

"Ah, the bridal-dress!" echoed Juliana bitterly: and for an instant her features were convulsed with the horrible nature of her thoughts. "True—I recollect—you came up: but you did not remain long."

"No: for I myself went to lay aside *my* bridal-dress. And then I was summoned into the presence of that tyrant Marquis who seemed to have grasped my destinies in his hand."

"And what wanted he with you, mother?" inquired Juliana, but without the excitement of curiosity: she spoke in the low deep accents of illimitable despair.

"To sign away my reputation, as yours had already been sacrificed in the drawing-room—to confess myself the slanderer of William Deveril—to avow that it was I who made overtures to him, and not he to me—that he repulsed *mine*—and that I calumniated him in all that I subsequently said!"

"Well, mother," said Juliana, "and now I will in my turn ask what you propose to do? But first of all tell me what has become of the guests assembled here some three hours back, and in whose presence I endured that fearful shame—that tremendous exposure—that crowning ignominy?"

"Where are those guests—our *friends*, I suppose you mean?" said Lady Saxondale bitterly. "They are all gone, every one of them—gone, no doubt to proclaim to their acquaintances all that occurred at the Castle—so that within twenty-four hours the whole county will ring with the intelligence, and within a few days the news will be propagated throughout the kingdom."

"It is horrible! it is horrible!" said Juliana, shuddering visibly. "And Lord Harold?"

"Gone too," quickly rejoined her mother. "Why should he stay?"

"Yes—why? He is gone, I presume, with his uncle, whom he will tell—if he has not told him already," said Juliana, "that he has been your paramour."

"Aye!" rejoined her ladyship; "and he may perhaps confess other things. Who knows? But it matters not. My resolve is taken."

"And my resolve also," replied Juliana, not heeding the other words Lady Saxondale had just uttered, and which indeed she comprehended not. "Yes—my resolve is taken!"

Then the mother and daughter looked each other steadily in the face: their eyes met—and a terrible free-masonry all of a sudden sprang into existence between the soul of the one and the soul of the other.

"I understand you, Juliana," said Lady Saxondale: "I know what your resolve is."

"And I understand you likewise, mother," was the daughter's response; "and I know what your resolve is."

"To die!"

"Yes—to die!"

On either side those brief monosyllables were

spoken firmly and resolutely, with a depth of desperation which the looks of the speakers likewise displayed; and then again did they gaze upon each other in a manner that would have been very terrible for an observer to contemplate, if any such observer had been present at the time. But there was none. Mother and daughter were alone together in that chamber.

"Yes," resumed Lady Saxondale after a pause, "that is my resolve——to die! Never more can I show my face to the world. I, who once stood upon so lofty a pedestal, shall soon become a degraded, a dishonoured, and a branded being! Besides, there are other reasons——But no matter. I repeat—my resolve is taken—to die!"

"And mine also," said Juliana. "I perhaps have less to live for than you. My disgrace is so signal—my dishonour so flagrant—my branding so terrible. And then, too, I have acquired the certainty that my amour with the now hated and detested Francis Paton——"

"I understand you, Juliana: you need say no more. We must both die. Will you that we die together?"

"Yes, yes—let us die together!" rejoined the daughter, clutching at the idea. "It may be a solace to have companionship even in death! I could almost love you once again, mother, for having made the offer."

"We will die together, Juliana:"—and then Lady Saxondale seated herself by her daughter's side upon the sofa—and they began to converse together in low ominous whispers, at the same time keeping their looks fixed upon each other with a strange, a sinister, and an awful meaning.

For five minutes did they thus discourse; and at the expiration of that interval Lady Saxondale rose up from the seat she had taken by her daughter's side.

"And you will have the courage, Juliana," she observed, "to maintain a calm and collected demeanour for the remainder of the day, in the presence of the domestics?"

"Mother, my looks shall be as calm and collected as your own," was the response, firmly and resolutely given. "If aught of our intention be betrayed, it shall not be my fault."

"Nor mine," rejoined Lady Saxondale: and she then quitted her daughter's chamber.

Descending once more to the library, she sat down at the table there and began to write. The statement she wrote was a lengthy one; and when she had finished it, she folded it up and placed it in an envelope, which she carefully sealed. Then she addressed the packet to the Lord High Chancellor of the United Kingdom, and locked it up in her writing-desk.

"At all events," she muttered to herself, "I will perform an act of vengeance before I go out of the world. Yes," she added, a fearfully malignant expression sweeping over her countenance, "that viper whom I have cherished and who has so often stung me, shall bitterly rue the insults he has made me endure! He will be trampled beneath society's heel——Ah, I shall be avenged upon him! I shall be avenged upon him!"

The dinner-bell now rang; and Lady Saxondale proceeded to the apartment where the meal was served up. Juliana speedily joined her mother there; and the domestics who waited at table, could not help exchanging furtive looks of surprise at the coolness with which the two ladies appeared to take the terrific scene of the morning. And those ladies—mother and daughter—allowed everything to go on in the usual way: they did not dismiss the servants from the room—they did not seem to be afraid or ashamed to look them in the face—they suffered all the ceremonies of the dinner-table to pass through the wonted routine. They ascended to the drawing-room, where they took coffee; and soon after ten o'clock, they separated to retire to their respective chambers.

CHAPTER CVIII.

SELF-ASPHYXIATION.

It was about eleven o'clock when Lady Saxondale, enveloped in a *negligée* wrapper, and her feet thrust into slippers, issued forth from her bed-room and descended to the kitchen-premises of the Castle. She had previously assured herself, as well as she was able by attentive listening, that all the domestics had withdrawn to their rooms: but if she had happened to meet any one who had not yet retired, she had an excuse ready. She would have said that she was ill—she wanted something—the bell-pull in her chamber was broken—and so she was descending to procure for herself what she required. But she met no one: and with a wax-candle in her hand, she entered the spacious kitchen.

There she filled a large portable brasier with a quantity of charcoal, of which she had previously known an abundance was always kept for culinary purposes. This brasier she concealed beneath the ample folds of her wrapper; and retraced her way without encountering a soul. But instead of returning to her own chamber, Lady Saxondale struck off into the passages and corridors leading to the western side of the Castle—that portion of the immense edifice, which, as the reader will remember, was untenanted, and which contained the tapestry-rooms and the chapel. She extinguished the light on passing along the passage whence those tapestry-rooms opened on the one side, and whence an array of windows looked from the other upon the court-yard. This precaution was taken to prevent any of the domestics on the opposite side of the quadrangle from perceiving a light moving about in that passage. Well however did Lady Saxondale know her way, even if utter darkness had prevailed: but there was a glimmering of moonlight—and thus she had not the slightest difficulty in reaching that tapestry-room which was nearest to the chapel. There she lighted the wax-candle by means of matches which she had brought for the purpose: and depositing the brasier on the carpet, she listened at the door, which she held ajar. In a few moments she heard the light sounds of footsteps advancing along the corridor; and Juliana promptly made her appearance.

Miss Farcfield was clad in a similar negligent manner as her mother: that is to say, she had on a wrapper and slippers. Her raven hair lay all unconfined in heavy masses upon her half-naked shoulders. She carried in her hand a small

count of the influx of fresh air, he took it to the casement and flung it out. It dropped with a loud splash and a terrific hissing sound into the Trent; and the next moment all was still once more.

Lady Saxondale, now completely recovered so far as her senses were concerned—but feeling very ill and weak—hastened to assist Juliana to rise: and when the daughter's looks settled upon the dreadful countenance of the Cannibal, she was seized with a stupifying horror. The thought that flashed to her mind was that she had passed into the other world, and that Satan had her in his power. She therefore sank down again, with a heavy moan, upon the floor.

"Conceal yourself—hasten behind the curtains," said Lady Saxondale, in a quick whispering voice to Chiffin. "I will come to you presently."

The Cannibal hastened to obey her ladyship's instructions; and when he was hidden behind the draperies of the window that remained closed, she bent over her daughter, saying, "Rise, Juliana—shake off this lethargy—rise, I conjure you!"

Miss Farefield opened her eyes once more and threw her fearful looks around;—but encountering not the dread object which had filled her with so much horror, she began to fancy it was a dream, and took courage.

"We are not to die this time," whispered Lady Saxondale: "you sought to be saved, Juliana—and you are saved!"

"Water, mother—water!" murmured the young lady. "I am parched with thirst."

"There is none here—you must make an effort to reach your chamber—I will go with you. There! lean upon me—cling to me, if you will: but do, for heaven's sake, exert all your energies! Come, Juliana—come!"

Miss Farefield stood up; and hanging to her mother's arm, moved slowly towards the door. There her ladyship speedily tore away the tapestry that had been thrust underneath; and when the door was opened, the draught created between the passage and the window by which Chiffin had entered, tended considerably to revive Juliana. The mother and daughter threaded their way through the semi-obscurity of the passages and corridors, towards that part of the building in which their own chambers were situated; and on reaching Juliana's apartment, they both drank large draughts of water with avidity. Lady Saxondale lighted a candle, hastened to the dining-room, and procured some wine. Returning to her daughter's chamber, they both partook of that wine; and they felt still more refreshed—still more invigorated.

"It appears to me all a dream," said Juliana, who had thrown herself upon the sofa. "But tell me—whom did I see? how was it that we were saved? who was that intruder?"

"Some robber that broke in," replied Lady Saxondale. "Did you not observe how precipitately he fled? But, no—you could not observe it——"

"I observed, mother, that he stood in the middle of the room," interrupted Juliana, "not exactly as a robber—but as one who seemed to be conscious of full impunity there."

"Never mind who he was, Juliana. Get you to bed. You will no doubt be very ill to-morrow—you will perhaps have to keep your chamber for a day or two——"

"But the state of that room—the torn tapestries—the odour of the charcoal! Suspicions will be excited——"

"Leave it all to me," quickly rejoined the mother. "But answer me, Juliana! Do you intend to live? Remember—I have a subtle poison——"

"Oh, no—no! mention it not!" and the young lady's countenance was convulsed with agonized horror as she spoke. "I have looked Death too closely in the face not to love the life which is restored to me, although it is a life of disgrace and dishonour. But you, mother—do you still think of self-destruction?"

"No, Juliana—no!" replied Lady Saxondale, with a visible shudder. "I could not—I could not!"

Miss Farefield entered her couch; and Lady Saxondale stole forth from the chamber. She was so weak and enfeebled she could scarcely drag herself along; and she would have given worlds, had she possessed them, to be enabled to go and seek her own bed. But she was compelled to return to that room which had so nearly proved the scene of death for herself and her daughter: she was compelled to return thither, not merely to remove the evidences of the deed that had been attempted, but likewise to see wherefore Chiffin the Cannibal had sought her this night. Ere proceeding thither, she entered her own room—took a quantity of money in notes and gold—and then retraced her way to the western side of the building.

On entering the apartment where she had left the Cannibal, she felt so weak that she was forced to fling herself upon the sofa. She found Chiffin seated upon a chair, with his club in his hand, and a grim expression of wonder still upon his countenance.

"Well, my lady," he said, "it seems to me that I interrupted as pretty a sport as ever was going on in an autumn night. What the deuce did it all mean?"

"Do not ask me for explanations," replied her ladyship quickly: "you can doubtless full well conjecture—and all things considered, I rather thank you for coming so opportunely——But no matter! Tell me—wherefore have you come?"

"I thought it just likely," answered Chiffin, "that you might wish to have a chat with me upon different matters. You know you told me you would look into the chapel on certain nights at eleven o'clock. This is one of the nights; and though I am an hour behind my time through getting down into these parts later than I thought I should, yet I resolved to look in. If so be I hadn't met your ladyship, I should have settled myself for a comfortable nap on one of them sofas, and should have got away afore day-break with the intention of coming back again on the next appointed night. But do tell me—what has happened to make your ladyship and that 'ansom daughter of your'n try to kill yourselves? I don't ask out of idle curiosity, but because I know something of your affairs——"

"Again I say do not question me!" interrupted her ladyship petulantly. "But yes," she added, as a recollection struck her, "I had better tell you. You have made some attempt to get rid of those two persons——"

"To be sure—and that's one thing I wanted to

chat about," remarked Chiffin; "cause why, you must take the will for the deed, and shell out at least a part of the reward promised at the time—particklar as I nearly got killed myself in trying to send those two chaps comfortably and quietly out of the world."

"Yes, yes—you shall have money—I knew you required it—I have brought it with me. Here it is."

"Thank 'ee kindly, ma'am," said the Cannibal, rising from his chair to receive the amount, which, without inspecting it, he judged to be pretty considerable. "And now about this here business I was going to tell you of——But, ah! what the deuce is that?"

"Away, away with you!" cried Lady Saxondale, seized with a wild affright: for the cause of the Cannibal's sudden ejaculation was a violent pealing of the bell at the Castle-entrance, and the sounds of which rang throughout the entire building.

The Cannibal stuffed the bank-notes and gold into one of his pockets and was flying to the open window, when, suddenly recollecting something, he stopped short for a moment, and said, "When and where shall I see you again, ma'am?"

"Go back to London—do not remain in this neighbourhood—for heaven's sake don't!" ejaculated her ladyship. "I shall myself be in London in a few days—I will write to you——Away! away!"

She was in a condition of wild excitement; and Chiffin the Cannibal, fearing that his situation was indeed precarious, made a speedy exit by means of the window, which Lady Saxondale hastened to close after him. Then she tore down the bundle of tapestry from the chimney—dragged it into the middle of the room—and left it there. Snatching up the lamp—(the candlestick she had taken with her when leading Juliana away)—she sped back in the direction of her own chamber. Fortunately she succeeded in gaining it without being observed, though several of the domestics were now moving about: for that loud and continuous pealing at the bell had alarmed the entire household. Lady Saxondale now rang her own bell; and Lucilla, half-dressed and with frightened looks, almost immediately made her appearance.

"What is the matter?" demanded her ladyship, in a quick and excited voice. "Go and see—hasten—and return speedily."

Lucilla departed to obey the orders of her mistress, who, fearful lest Juliana might in a moment of apprehension betray something of the night's proceedings, lost no time in repairing to her chamber. Miss Farefield was indeed seriously alarmed, and was almost in an hysterical state,—which, strong-minded though she were, was scarcely to be wondered at, after the dreadful excitement she had gone through in the day, and the effects of the suicidal attempt so recently made.

"For heaven's sake, exhibit no weakness now!" said Lady Saxondale. "Remain quiet—I will tell the maids that I have been to reassure you—do not ring for them—do not quit your bed—but endeavour to obtain some rest. I understand the cause of this pealing at the gate. That man threw the burning brasier out of the window: doubtless it was seen by persons in the neighbourhood——"

"But the state of the room?" interrupted Juliana; "the torn tapestry—the odour of the charcoal——"

"That odour is not perceptible now," quickly responded Lady Saxondale: "the fresh breeze through the window has taken it away. Never mind the torn tapestry—let the servants and those persons who have come to give the alarm, form what surmise they will. And now compose yourself, Juliana—compose yourself: we have so much need of all our fortitude!"

With these words Lady Saxondale quitted the chamber, and returned to her own apartment There she was almost immediately joined by Lucilla, who informed her that a couple of labourers, passing through the fields on the other side of the river, had seen what appeared to be a ball of fire shoot forth from one of the windows of the tapestry-rooms; and that crossing the bridge, which was at a little distance from the castle, they had come round to the front with all possible speed to give the alarm. Lucilla farther observed that the butler and several other servants had gone to examine the apartments on the western side of the castle; and that they were all much alarmed at the intelligence they had received.

Lady Saxondale, affecting to be much astonished at Lucilla's information, threw an ample shawl over her shoulders; and bidding the girl follow with the lamp, hastened towards the tapestry-rooms. She found the domestics and the two labourers in that apartment where the double attempt at suicide had been so ineffectually made; and the moment she crossed the threshold, her ladyship pretended to be as much enraged as surprised at the spectacle of the torn tapestry. She demanded what it meant: but, as a matter of course, no one could give her any explanation. That some person had been there, was evident enough: and it was indeed a puzzle for all, except Lady Saxondale herself, to form even the slightest conjecture as to what motive anybody could possibly have had in destroying the tapestry. The question likewise arose—what meant the ball of fire which the labourers had seen? Who could explain this? The only person then present who had the power to do so, did not choose—but, on the contrary, affected to be as much astonished as the rest.

There was a growing consternation upon the countenances of the domestics and the labourers: for, as the reader will recollect, it was not the first time that strange stories had been circulated in respect to the western side of Saxondale Castle: and how was it now possible to account for that vivid light which had shot forth from the window, and had seemed to disappear in the river—or for that torn tapestry and the disordered state of the room—except by attributing these things to the freaks of evil spirits? Lady Saxondale, who on all previous occasions had wrathfully censured and strenuously discouraged the superstitious tales that were current in respect to the Castle, now appeared to be dismayed and confounded, and to share the terror of the rest. Retiring from the room, she was promptly followed by the others, who had no inclination to remain behind in a place which they now more firmly than ever believed to be haunted. Ordering the door to be locked, Lady Saxondale returned to the other part of the building; and having liberally rewarded the labourers for their

trouble, and recommended the servants to retire to their respective chambers, she once more sought her own.

In the afternoon of the following day Lady Saxondale and Juliana took their departure from the Castle; and two days afterwards they set their feet upon the French soil,—having resolved, for many obvious reasons, to quit England for a time, and settle themselves in some retired place on the Continent, where her ladyship would be out of reach of any danger, and both herself and daughter far from the sphere where gossip and scandal were so busy with their names.

Before concluding this chapter, it may perhaps be necessary to give some few explanations respecting Mr. Hawkshaw's conduct, in addition to those to which he himself had given utterance before the assembled guests at Saxondale Castle. It will be recollected that up to the moment of the scene in the conservatory at Mr. Denison's, Hawkshaw was totally unsuspicious that Juliana Farefield was the depraved and guilty heroine of Francis Paton's narrative. At the moment the Squire was entering that conservatory, he was not aware that any other persons were present: he was merely seeking its refreshing coolness after the stifling heat of the ball-room. But as he was crossing the threshold, he heard voices; and the words which Juliana was uttering at the moment, struck as a terrible revelation to his soul, making him stop short. He was literally confounded. Even if averse to hear any more, he had not the power to move away: he was transfixed to the spot. He seemed to be under the influence of a horrible night-mare: but there was nevertheless a tremendous reality in the conversation which was progressing, and every syllable of which reached his ears. The rows of stately plants and the mass of luxuriant foliage in the conservatory, concealed him from the view of Frank and Juliana; —and, rooted to the spot, he lost not a syllable that was said. Fortunate was it for him that he was thus paralysed with dismay—silenced and rendered motionless by consternation: for he was thus enabled to collect his thoughts with a certain degree of calmness, and to exercise a control over his feelings. Had he given way to a sudden paroxysm of excitement, it is possible that he would have sprung forward, and levelling the most terrific denunciations at Juliana, would have created a tremendous uproar at Mr. Denison's house. But being thus enabled to repress any such excitement, and to look with a certain calmness at the entire picture of her monstrous perfidy, his thoughts gradually settled themselves into a resolve to take a signal revenge. His love for Juliana became all in an instant changed into the deadliest hate. He himself was of so frank, honest, and confiding a disposition, that it was natural he should be led to regard with the direst aversion a being of so depraved a heart as Juliana.

Mr. Hawkshaw's determination being thus adopted, he of course felt the necessity of dissimulating to the utmost of his power towards Juliana, until the moment for wreaking his revenge should come. He experienced no animosity against young Paton: for the latter knew not at the time that Juliana was the object of Mr. Hawkshaw's love;—and even if he had known it, all that was criminal between the youth and the young lady had taken place long previously. Thus Hawkshaw's friendly conduct changed not towards the youth: but the reader will perhaps remember how at breakfast on the morning after the ball, Hawkshaw had taken the opportunity of advising him most earnestly, and in the strongest language, to shun as he would a reptile the lady who was the object of his visit into Lincolnshire. When they repaired to Mr Denison's house to dinner, Mr. Hawkshaw took an opportunity of speaking aside to that gentleman, and revealed to him all he had overheard in the conservatory on the previous evening. Mr. Denison was not merely amazed and shocked, but likewise felt himself and his family to be outraged by the circumstance that such a foul creature as Juliana should dare to frequent their dwelling as a friend and guest. Nor less was he indignant and scandalized at the idea of the terrific cheat which Juliana had contemplated to practise upon his friend Hawkshaw. Therefore Mr. Denison had willingly agreed to co-operate in Hawkshaw's design of making a tremendous exposure of the profligate young lady. Hence the conversation which took place between Mr. Denison and Frank Paton after the dinner; and hence too that letter which Mr. Denison counselled Frank to write, and which indeed he dictated. The Marquis of Eagledean was then duly informed of all that was going on; and he wrote back to say that he would be present at Saxondale Castle on the day and precisely at the hour fixed for the solemnization of the double wedding. For the nobleman, as we have already seen, conceived it to be a favourable opportunity for rescuing his nephew Lord Harold from the power of Lady Saxondale.

CHAPTER CIX.

THE CASTLEMAINES.

We must now direct the attention of our readers to the splendid mansion of the Earl of Castlemaine at Kensington, one of the fashionable suburbs of the British metropolis. It cannot be forgotten how Dr. Forney was one night fetched hurriedly by the Earl in person to that palatial residence, in order to see the Countess, who had been taken dangerously ill after returning with her husband from a ball at the Duke of Harcourt's. It must also be remembered how the physician, after visiting the unhappy lady in the midst of the ravings of her delirium, in her own chamber, had reported to the Earl that she was in a way to become a mother.

More than two months had elapsed since that memorable night; and Lady Castlemaine had continued dangerously ill. Throughout this long interval her mind appeared to have fallen into the most alarming disorder: her brain seemed to be touched—her ravings were frequent and incoherent, oftentimes rising into frenzy, and only succeeded by the lull of an idiotic stupor. Not once during those two months had she experienced a lucid moment: or if she had, she was too much prostrated and enfeebled at the time to give audible utterance to any sane thoughts that might have collected themselves in her mind.

Dr. Forney had called daily, with the exception of that temporary absence from London whic

was caused by his visit to Saxondale Castle in respect to the mysterious death of Mabel Stewart. An eminent surgeon was likewise called in; and thus the Countess of Castlemaine had the best medical attention that could be obtained. Lord Castlemaine had continued at the mansion during the whole of that interval of two months: so that the world out-of-doors might naturally suppose him to be profoundly solicitous as to his wife's health, notwithstanding the whispered rumours which had for some years been current that they lived not happily together. But if his lordship had been habitually reserved and taciturn previous to his wife's illness, he had become still more so since that memorable night on which he learnt from Dr. Ferney's lips the certainty that her ladyship was in a way to become a mother. He had kept much to his own private apartments;—he seldom went out, scarcely even to take necessary exercise: he abstained from society —and frequently gave orders that the servants should represent him as being "not at home" when visitors called.

As a matter of course, the domestics whispered a great deal amongst themselves respecting all these matters. Lord and Lady Castlemaine had been married about seven years: but for the last four they had occupied separate chambers. Hitherto no children had resulted from their union: but now that under existing circumstances her ladyship was in a way to become a mother, and that the Earl appeared not pleased with the prospect of the responsibility of paternity, it was indeed sufficient to induce the domestics thus to canvass the affair amongst themselves. But though it was scarcely possible to avoid some unpleasant suspicion in respect to the Countess, it was still more difficult on the other hand to discover any proofs thereof, beyond the fact that she was pregnant and that for four years she and her husband had occupied distinct apartments. The conduct of Priscilla—which was the lady's Christian name—had ever appeared to be characterised by the strictest propriety: it was impossible to look around upon the circle of her acquaintance, and fix upon a single male individual who had received any distinguishing mark of her favour. Even when in society, her behaviour was equally unexceptionable. She never danced: the arm of no gay gallant ever encircled her waist in the voluptuous waltz: the eyes of no libertine were ever thus furnished with an opportunity of looking sensuously down into her own. Not one of the domestics, most of whom had been for some years in the establishment, could recollect a single incident in the Countess of Castlemaine's proceedings to afford the slightest shadow of a justification for suspecting her fair fame. Though eminently beautiful, and but in her twenty-fourth year—in the bloom and glory of womanhood—at an age and in a position when a woman might naturally be supposed to feel flattered by the incense of adulation—Lady Castlemaine had by the dignified reserve of her manners kept all idle flatterers and would-be admirers at a distance. So far from displaying the slightest levity, the propriety of her conduct appeared to have been based upon that natural love of virtue which ever places a guard upon looks and language as well as upon actions. How, then, was it possible to believe that this lady had strayed into the path of error, and that her whole conduct was an immense dissimulation—a studied falsehood—a practised lie, admirably concealed under the garb of truth!

Since that night on which the Countess of Castlemaine's illness commenced, the Earl had spoken but little to Dr. Ferney. Every day he made inquiries respecting her ladyship's health—received the answer—and said no more. Every day too he paid a brief visit to the sick chamber,—sometimes twice: but in his inscrutable countenance neither Mrs. Broughton (the senior lady's-maid) nor her two junior assistants, could read what was passing in his mind. They saw that he was profoundly mournful—and that was all. They could not even tell whether this mournfulness arose on account of his wife's dangerous illness, or from any other cause. Sometimes the Earl would stand by the side of the couch when Priscilla was raving in delirium; and with arms folded across his chest, he would remain motionless, his eyes fixed upon her with an expression that none present could comprehend. But though he might possibly be drinking in with avidity every word that came from her lips when she spoke in those ravings, yet from his manner it did not seem that he was inspired by any such degree of curiosity. At other times, when the invalid lay wrapped in unconsciousness—a complete stupor of the senses—the Earl would still stand gazing upon her; and still, too, could no one comprehend whether he felt pity for her condition and hope that she would recover—or whether the settled mournfulness of his looks might be traceable to some other feeling. But on none of these occasions when he thus visited the sick-chamber, did the Countess recognise him: indeed she recognised no one. When not plunged into stupor, her thoughts seemed to be all in confusion—her mind appeared to be a wreck. One circumstance especially was noticed by Mrs. Broughton, and the two younger female dependants attached to her ladyship's own personal service. This was that Lord Castlemaine, on his visits to the room, never bent down to touch his wife's cheek with his lips—never bestowed upon her the slightest caress—never even so much as took her hand in his own.

Mrs. Broughton was too discreet to gossip with the other domestics relative to the affairs of their master and mistress. She was a woman of forty—had seen better days in earlier life—and was well brought up. She was devotedly attached to the Countess, in whose service she had been from the time of her ladyship's marriage with Lord Castlemaine. If she did not however speak upon those subjects, Mrs. Broughton nevertheless reflected often and profoundly—without however bringing her meditations to any satisfactory issue: for the whole affair seemed to be involved in a strange mystery. She knew full well that for four years the husband and wife had occupied separate apartments—that there had been a certain estrangement between them in private, although they had done their best to keep up proper appearances before the world. Beyond all doubt was it that the Countess was in a way to become a mother; and though Mrs. Broughton was astounded when the discovery was made, yet how could she possibly suspect that her mistress had gone astray? If there had been an intrigue, it could well have been kept from the knowledge of herself? Visits must have been paid

by the favoured gallant—or assignments made and kept; and if there were no visits to arrange such appointments, there must have been messages or letters. But nothing of the sort had come to Mrs. Broughton's knowledge. She never even once remembered her mistress going out alone, unless she could have been said to do so when proceeding by herself for an airing in the carriage; and then, if she had committed any imprudence or done anything suspicious, the coachman and footman in attendance on the equipage would have been certain to speak of it. They, however, in their gossippings with the other servants, had spoken to the exact contrary: and altogether poor Mrs. Broughton was as much perplexed as she was afflicted on account of her beloved mistress.

One night—about two months after the commencement of Lady Castlemaine's illness—Mrs. Broughton was sitting in the invalid's chamber, with a book in her hand, but engaged rather in her own reflections than in the contents of the volume. Her mistress was slumbering soundly; and Dr. Ferney, on paying his evening visit, had declared that there was a slight but nevertheless plainly visible improvement, both as regarded her physical health and the state of her mind. Not that she had regained complete mental self-possession; but she had gazed less wildly and less vacantly upon the physician—and he could tell by the expression of her look that there was an incipient revival of the reasoning power. Mrs. Broughton had been well pleased at this intelligence; and she was now reflecting upon it, as well as upon what circumstances might transpire when her beloved mistress should be enabled to converse rationally once more. It was half-past eleven o'clock—or perhaps even still nearer midnight: a profound silence reigned through the dwelling—for the servants of the household, always of regular habits, had been accustomed to retire still earlier than was their wont since the illness of Lady Castlemaine. A nurse had been engaged to attend upon her during her indisposition: but Mrs. Broughton usually sent her about ten o'clock to her own chamber, to snatch a couple or three hours' sleep, so that she might pass the remainder of the night in the invalid's room without so much danger of yielding to slumber as if she obtained no rest at all. Therefore it was Mrs. Broughton's practice to keep watch during the first portion of the night: and this she was doing now, on the particular occasion of which we are speaking.

The worthy woman was sitting in a large arm-chair, with the book in her hand, and her eyes fixed upon the couch where her mistress lay. The wax-candles were burning upon a table in the middle of the room, which, being spacious, they did not light completely. Presently Mrs. Broughton fancied she heard a door open in the suite of apartments to which this bed-chamber belonged, and of which it was the last. For next to the bed-chamber was a boudoir, or luxuriously appointed lounging and dressing-room: beyond that was a sitting-room, where any intimate lady-friends might be received by the mistress of the mansion when she chose to dispense with the formality of descending to the drawing-room. Beyond that sitting-room was the ante-room, thus completing the suite, and opening from a long and splendidly decorated corridor.

When Mrs. Broughton heard that door open, it immediately occurred to her that it was the nurse coming, and she therefore did not think it strange. But as several minutes elapsed and no one appeared, she began to wonder somewhat at the circumstance: for she felt assured that she had distinctly heard the sound in question,—and she was almost equally certain that it was the door between the boudoir and the sitting-room. Still she remained some few minutes longer, the thought having occurred to her that the nurse might be doing something in the boudoir. Indeed, she now distinctly heard footsteps there—and then the noise of a chair moving, as if some one had knocked against it.

Remembering that there was no light in any of those rooms, it now struck her that the nurse had come from the chamber above without a candle, and was groping her way in the dark. So Mrs. Broughton considerately rose from her chair and hastened to open the door, that the light in the bed-chamber might serve as a guide for the old nurse thither. She did not take one of the wax-candles in her hand; and just a sufficiency of light penetrated from the bed-chamber into the boudoir, when the door was opened, to make objects dimly visible in the latter place. Scarcely had Mrs. Broughton thus opened that door, when through the gloom of the boudoir she beheld the form of a man. The individual instantaneously retreated, closing the opposite door of the boudoir behind him; and Mrs. Broughton was so astounded at the circumstance, that she had not the presence of mind to follow immediately. More than a minute elapsed ere she could sufficiently recover herself to fly back to the table, snatch up a light, and hasten through the rooms: but on gaining the corridor, she beheld no one. All was still—a profound silence reigned through the mansion. She passed along the corridor until she reached the landing whence it branched off, and whence on the opposite side another corridor led to the private apartments of the Earl of Castlemaine, as described in that chapter where our readers were first introduced to the mansion.

Mrs. Broughton stood for a few moments in the middle of that landing, listening with suspended breath; but no sound met her ears. Should she raise an alarm that there was some stranger in the house? No: for the circumstance would at once seem to stamp with conviction the dim and vague suspicions already floating about amongst the inmates of the dwelling in respect to her beloved mistress. Besides, she did not imagine for a moment that the intruder had entered on a plundering expedition: she felt assured that he was no evil-intentioned burglar;—for brief and transitory though the glimpse was which she had obtained of him in the gloom of the boudoir, she had nevertheless seen enough to judge that he was a gentleman. This was the impression made upon her mind; and though, if questioned, she could not have described anything definite as to his appearance—much less a single feature of his face—yet she knew that in respect to her general idea of his being well dressed she was not mistaken.

She retraced her way to the bed-chamber; and soon afterwards the old nurse made her appearance, Mrs. Broughton had not the slightest inclination

for sleep, and though she betrayed not her feelings to the nurse, she notwithstanding felt too much troubled and uneasy in her mind to seek the solitude of her own chamber. She accordingly resumed her seat in the sick room, remarking to the nurse that not feeling tired, she would sit up a little longer. Whether it were that the nurse herself was unrefreshed by her own interval of sleep—or whether it were that she thought that as Mrs. Broughton was there, she might just as well indulge in another nap—we cannot take ti upon ourselves to decide. Certain however was it that the old woman did gradually doze off in her chair; while, on the other hand Mrs. Broughton remained wide awake. Indeed, she had never in her life felt a greater disinclination to close her eyes than on this present occasion. She was literally haunted by the figure she had seen; and for the first time since the discovery that Lady Castlemaine was in a way to become a mother, did Mrs. Broughton experience a very serious misgiving as to the chastity of her mistress. Hitherto the good woman had done her best to banish everything savouring of suspicion from her mind: but now she felt this suspicion fastening itself upon her in a manner that defied resistance—tightening its hold—clinging to her with a tenacity which it was impossible to shake off.

Was the Countess, then, really guilty? had she been in the habit of receiving the stealthy and nocturnal visits of some paramour? did a favoured gallant find means, totally unsuspected by the household, to introduce himself into the mansion and thread his way to her ladyship's chamber? was some secret and cunningly devised signal, incomprehensible to all but the guilty pair themselves, the method by which the lover had on former occasions known when to seek the lady's bower? and was the visit of this night to be accounted for by the supposition that not having seen that signal, whatever it might be, for two months past, he had resolved,

in the desperation of suspense and the ardour of love, to penetrate into the mansion at all risks and endeavour to ascertain for himself the cause of that cessation of the signal?

When once a suspicion settles in the mind, it speedily engenders a host of conjectures which appear to furnish the most feasible means of clearing up a mystery. So was it in Mrs. Broughton's case now; and hence all those imaginings and speculations which we have just recorded. But who could the favoured gallant be that he did not know of the lady's illness and thus be aware of the reason why the love-signal ceased to be given? or if he were informed of that illness, how was it that he proved himself rash or indiscreet enough thus to think of penetrating to a sick chamber where he might naturally suppose there were watchers by the invalid's bedside? These questions certainly appeared difficult to answer,—unless the solution was to be found in the belief that the gallant *was* aware of the illness, and that rendered almost frenzied by grief and maddened by the extent of his love, he had determined to risk everything in order to obtain an opportunity of throwing a single look upon the object of his adoration. But poor Mrs. Broughton was profoundly shocked and afflicted when she found herself compelled to come to such conclusions as these, and to settle down in the conviction that her beloved mistress had indeed strayed into the path of error.

The time-piece on the mantel in the boudoir adjoining proclaimed the hour of one in the morning. The old nurse was dozing in her chair: nay, more than dozing—she was fast asleep. Lady Castlemaine was still wrapped in profound slumber: she was passing the best night she had yet experienced since the date of her illness. Mrs. Broughton was still wide awake—and still felt not the slightest inclination to close her eyes or lie down. One of the wax-candles, having burnt into its socket, had just gone out; and the flickering of the other reminded the good woman that it would speedily share the fate of its companion. She rose from her seat to fetch another pair of lights from the toilet-table, when she was suddenly startled by hearing the door open. She looked hastily around; and just at the very instant that the second candle was expiring in its socket, she caught a glimpse of the figure of a man upon the threshold. The next moment she was in total darkness: she heard the door close again—a scream rose to her very lips—but she repressed it; and immediately recovering her self-possession, was mechanically hastening in pursuit of the intruder, when she fell against the nurse, who woke up with a start.

"Hush—not a word—it is I!" said Mrs. Broughton, fearing that the old woman might give vent to an ejaculation of alarm, and thus disturb the Countess.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked the nurse, in a sleepy voice. "I fancy you have been dozing, and tumbled out of your chair. I have been awake the whole time."

"Then perhaps you saw the candles go out," said Mrs. Broughton, who knew full well how much reliance was to be placed upon the old nurse's assertion. "But we will soon have others."

The fresh candles were accordingly lighted; and Mrs. Broughton, taking one of them, said that she should go and lie down on the sofa in the sitting-room. The nurse asked why she did not go to bed:—but the lady's-maid merely gave some evasive answer, and issued forth from the sick chamber. She passed through the boudoir—she entered the sitting-room—and seating herself there, she blew out the light, with the determination of watching in the dark to ascertain if the intruder should penetrate to that suite of rooms any more,—in which case she had made up her mind to speak to him, and remonstrate in the most earnest manner against his insensate proceedings, by which her mistress might be seriously compromised if not actually ruined. While thus seated upon that sofa in the dark, Mrs. Broughton taxed her memory to the extremest verge, in order to gather if possible something like a definite impression of the countenance of that individual whom she had seen in the doorway, and who she of course felt assured must be the same whose flitting form she had previously caught a glimpse of in the boudoir. But she could fashion to herself no idea of what that face was like: she had just seen it—and *only* just seen it: for a swift brief moment had her eyes been turned upon it, and then the abrupt extinction of the candle had enveloped the scene in darkness. She was therefore compelled to come to the conclusion that if it had been the face of her own husband from the tomb, or of any one whom she was in the habit of seeing every day and therefore familiarly acquainted with, she would not have recognised it. She sincerely hoped that the intruder would come back again while she remained there, that she might have the opportunity of putting an end to his visits altogether. She saw that if he should come at a time when she was not there, and should be discovered, a terrible explosion would ensue. She had no longer any doubt—no, not the slightest—as to the frailty of her mistress; and being a woman of very strict principles, she was both shocked and pained at the thought that after all the endeavours to persuade herself into a belief of Lady Castlemaine's immaculate virtue, she should thus find herself so cruelly deceived. She even seriously reflected that it would be a duty which she owed herself to leave the Countess's service: but as a matter of course she did not think of taking such a step until her ladyship should be thoroughly restored to convalescence.

An hour passed—the time-piece struck two—and there was no symptom of any farther intrusion. Still Mrs. Broughton resolved to sit up a little longer. She was not wearied, nor was she sleepy. The activity of her thoughts, so painfully excited, kept away all sense of fatigue and all inclination to slumber. Nor was she cold: indeed the night was so warm, although it was late in September, that the fires in the suite of rooms had been suffered to go out some hours back. Again did Mrs. Broughton give way to her reflections with regard to the incidents of this night. Thus another hour passed—it was now three in the morning—all continued silent—and therefore, feeling assured that the intruder would not penetrate thither again on the present occasion, she retired to her own chamber.

CHAPTER CX.

MORE MYSTERIES.

It was about noon on the following day, and Lady Castlemaine was once more plunged in a profound sleep,—when the Earl paid his usual visit. Only Mrs. Broughton happened to be in attendance at the time; and in answer to his lordship's questions, she said that the Countess had slept soundly for the greater portion of the night—but that, according to the nurse's report, she had grown restless, feverish, and excited towards morning, though her ravings were much less violent and much less incoherent than they yet had been. The Earl, having received this intelligence, said nothing more; but shutting himself up in his wonted taciturnity, stood by the side of the couch with his eyes fixed upon the pale features of his sleeping wife. Gradually, and as if quite unconsciously on his part, he folded his arms across his chest, and then remained motionless as a statue. But the mournfulness of his countenance deepened into a gloom which became settled there; and his features were clouded with inscrutable thoughts. He has previously been described as a man of dark complexion, with coal black hair, and eyes to match; and there is always something more terrible in the aspect of such a countenance as this, when shrouded in gloom, than in one of any other style.

Mrs. Broughton, hearing the time-piece strike, found that it was twelve o'clock; and thinking that the Countess would soon awake, when it would be necessary to administer some medicine which Dr. Ferney had prescribed on the previous day, she looked about in search of the bottle containing the mixture. It was empty—and she quitted the chamber to go and look in the anteroom if a fresh supply had been sent from the chemist's,—in which case she would be sure to find it there. It was not to be seen; and as neither the nurse nor the two younger lady's-maids happened to be near at the moment, Mrs. Broughton, to save time, hurried down stairs to make an inquiry of the hall-porter, or else to send some one to the apothecary's shop. A few minutes sufficed for her purpose; and on returning to the sick chamber, she entered so noiselessly—without however any unusual degree of precaution—that the Earl of Castlemaine did not hear either the door opening or her footsteps.

"Can it be? is it possible that thou should'st have thus fallen away from the path of virtue and yielded thyself up to a paramour? Thou may'st have ceased to love me—and it may be my fault that thou hast done so: but yet—but yet——"

Here Mrs. Broughton,—who had been quite an involuntary ear-witness of the words wherein the Earl slowly and mournfully apostrophised his sleeping wife,—purposely moved a chair somewhat roughly that he might be made aware of her presence; for she did not choose to suffer him to go on speaking in the belief that he was alone in that chamber. But never afterwards did the woman forget the fierce abruptness with which the Earl turned round upon her—the dark and terrible scowl which sprang up on his countenance, rendering it for the moment almost diabolic in its expression—or the violence with which he clutched her by the arm, and bending his piercing black eyes upon her, said, "You were listening!"

"Not intentionally, my lord," she answered, with an almost instantaneous recovery of her self-possession: for she was indignant at the charge.

"Well—unintentionally then," he continued, still looking fiercely and deeply down into her eyes, as if to penetrate to her very soul. "But you heard what I said——Yes, I know that I was speaking aloud ——Fool that I was to be thus incautious—thus ungaarded! Mrs. Broughton," he added quickly, "you are a good woman—a trustworthy woman! Will you swear to me, as if you were answering to your God, that you will never reveal to a soul what you have just heard issue from my lips?"

"My lord," responded Mrs. Broughton, "I like not such an adjuration as that——"

"Ah, but you shall swear! you shall swear!" interrupted the nobleman, in a low hoarse voice, while his countenance became lived with rage. "You shall swear—or, by heaven! I will kill you!" —and the hand which still clutched the woman's arm, tightened about it as if it were in an iron vice; and the blue mark remained for days afterwards.

"My lord, making allowance for the excitement of your feelings," she said, "I faithfully and solemnly promise you that I will never divulge the words you uttered ere now."

The Earl of Castlemaine gazed intensely upon her for nearly a minute, as if to satisfy himself that he could believe her; and then he abruptly said, "Enough! I put faith in you. I will not offer you gold now as a bribe to secrecy; for it would lessen the solemnity of the assurance you have given me. But rely upon my generosity. Yes—you will keep the secret; for my honour is concerned!"—and the words came thick and low from his throat, while the expression of his countenance was inscrutably terrible.

He then turned abruptly away and quitted the room, leaving Mrs. Broughton to reflect upon all that had taken place. Whatsoever doubts—if any —had still remained in her mind, as to the frailty of the Countess of Castlemaine, after the occurrences of the preceding night, they were now all completely dissipated, since the revelation which the Earl had made of a bitter consciousness of his own dishonour. But how was it that he had not either sent forth the guilty woman from the house, or else quitted it himself, the moment he made the first discovery of her shame?—and how was it that he thus regularly visited the invalid day after day, and that before the world he maintained the appearance of a satisfied husband? Was it that he preferred keeping his dishonour secret, even though thereby compelled to maintain certain terms with the authoress of it? —or was it that he only waited till she should be recovered, in order to wreak some signal vengeance? No: it was not this latter hypothesis which would account for the Earl's conduct; for were it so, he would not visit the chamber of his guilty wife—he would not have apostrophised her in that mournful manner which Mrs. Broughton had overheard—he would not have so solemnly adjured her to secrecy, with the intimation that his honour was at stake. It must therefore be the former hypothesis which must be the correct one; and it was to maintain *that honour* untarnished in the eyes of the world,

and to save his proud name from humiliation, that he had resolved upon the sacrifice of all other feelings. At least so thought the worthy lady's-maid; and as she gazed upon the pale countenance of her sleeping mistress, she also said, "Is it possible that, with virtue's semblance, you can be so guilty?"

When night came, Mrs. Broughton told the nurse that she need not trouble herself to take her turn till between two and three in the morning, as she herself intended to remain with her mistress until a later hour than usual, in consequence of certain instructions which Dr. Ferney had given her. The pretext was not true; but the deception was venial, besides being insignificant, inasmuch as the lady's-maid had a good object in view. The reader can understand that this was to fulfil her intention of the previous night; and if the intruder should penetrate to those chambers, to remonstrate or threaten so effectually as to put an end to his visits. The old nurse was by no means sorry to find herself allowed an extra hour or two for sleep that night; and when she had quitted the bed-chamber, Mrs. Broughton sat down, resolved to keep her ears ready to catch the slightest sound of an opening door. She did not dare go and place herself in either of the other rooms in the dark, to intercept the intruder, should he come; because it was absolutely necessary for her to remain watching near the bed in which her mistress lay, so as to be at hand for any requisite ministrations. Neither had she chosen to leave the old nurse in the bed-chamber while she stationed herself elsewhere, for fear lest it should seem odd to the woman that she thus on two nights running adopted the same course. So she remained where she was, having sent the nurse to bed, to await whatsoever might transpire.

Lady Castlemaine slept as tranquilly as she had done on the preceding night; for a marked improvement had taken place in her condition within the last two days. Eleven o'clock struck——another hour passed, and midnight was proclaimed by the silver voice of the time-piece in the boudoir. Mrs. Broughton experienced a deep suspense; for she reflected that if her lady's paramour did purpose to return at all, the moment must be near at hand. Scarcely had she made this reflection, when she distinctly heard a door open somewhere in the suite of apartments; and rising from her seat, she went and posted herself close by the door of the bed-chamber, so that the instant it should open she might be at hand to address the intruder. But all was now still: not a sound reached her ears. She remained upwards of five minutes in that position: no one came—nothing more was heard. Yet she was certain that she *had* heard a door open. Should she take a light and go and see if any one were in either of the rooms? No: for the moment she might open the chamber-door with a candle, it would be the means of scaring the intruder away; and this was not what she wanted. Should she steal forth in the dark and listen, so that if the intruder was lurking about,—watching for a particular opportunity, or concealed behind any of the draperies,—she might catch some sound to reveal his whereabouts, and thus her objects would be answered?

Having hastily assured herself that her mistress was still slumbering deeply and tranquilly, she extinguished the candles, so that on opening the door no light might shine forth; and treading as noiselessly as a stealing ghost over the thick carpets, careful also to prevent her dress from giving forth the slightest rustle, Mrs. Broughton passed through the boudoir and entered the sitting-room. A pitchy darkness prevailed here: for the thick curtains were drawn over the windows. Every other moment she stopped and listened: but she heard nothing, save the palpitation of her own heart under the influence of anxious suspense. Gradually she passed on through the inky darkness, to the sofa where she sat on the preceding night. Here she resolved to sit down again, and tarry in that room for at least ten minutes, which interval was the outside that she dared remain away from the invalid's chamber. But she thought that if the stealthy-entering paramour were there at all, he would certainly make a move within that space of time; and she would at once accost him—she would clutch him by the arm—and she would compel him to remain, while she adjured him, if he had any regard for her mistress, that he would not compromise her more seriously than he had already done.

So noiselessly and carefully had Mrs. Broughton threaded her way to the sofa, that if there had been a dozen persons concealed in the room, and each possessed of the sharpest ears, not one of them would have caught the slightest sound to betray her stealthy presence. With the same caution was she gradually sinking towards a sitting posture on the sofa, when her hand suddenly came in contact with *another* hand—a hand that was cold as ice; and at the same instant a low sepulchral groan sounded close by her ear. Her hand was snatched away as if it had come in contact with a reptile coiled up on the sofa; and she sank back in the stupor of consternation. Without actually falling into a swoon, she was for more than a minute in a state bordering upon unconsciousness: it was a paralysis of the senses. That sudden contact with the ice-cold hand—that hollow moan seeming to issue from the throat of the troubled dead—was indeed sufficient to produce this overpowering effect. It was an awful terror that all in an instant had smitten her. But as she slowly regained her self-possession, her courage revived sufficiently for her to thrust forth her arm to ascertain if any one were still seated by her side: but nothing encountered her touch—naught but the impalpable air of inky darkness. Still more did her fortitude return: she hastily groped her way back to the bed-chamber—she lighted the wax-candles—and having satisfied herself by a glance that her mistress was still sleeping, she took one of the lights and proceeded to search the other rooms. She passed through the boudoir—no one was there: she entered the sitting-room—no living being met her view: she looked behind all the draperies—still no one! She passed into the ante-room: and there her fruitless search ended.

Instinctively, as she returned into the sitting-room, her glance was thrown again towards that sofa where she had encountered the death-cold hand and heard the hollow moan; and she perceived something white lying upon the carpet. She hastened forward to pick it up. It was a note, the contents of which were brief, and in the handwriting of the Countess. Without pausing to consider whether there were any indiscretion in the

act, Mrs. Broughton read that note, which was thus worded:—

"You know that I love you—love you adoringly, passionately! Wherefore should you write in such a despondingmanner, as if you doubted the sincerity of my affection? Yes—I repeat that I love you—you only; and heaven grant that this assurance may render you happy! Pray do not in future mistrust this love of mine: pray do not, either by words spoken or written, manifest a distrust of that heart which is wholly yours. You know not the unhappiness you cause me when you thus seem to doubt my affection. If I were acquainted with a language more potent than that which I now use to give you these assurances, believe me I would adopt it.

"Ever thine,

"PRISCILLA."

This letter had no date, and was not addressed to any one by name. It had no doubt been forwarded in an envelope, which was not now with it. Mrs. Broughton, as above stated, had hastened to read its contents without pausing to reflect whether she were justified in doing so: but she had acted on the spur of the moment—and under all circumstances, when she came to think of the proceeding, she could not blame herself for it.

She had found the note close by the sofa where a few minutes back she was thrown into such an awful consternation; she was well assured that it was not there when at about ten o'clock she had come to the rooms, or else she could not have failed to perceive it. Or even if she had by any chance happened to overlook it,—the nurse, when passing that way with a candle, would most probably have seen it. Everything considered, it was tolerably evident that it had been dropped there some time during the two hours which had elapsed since she herself had returned to the bedchamber after her supper, and when she dismissed the nurse. But might it not have been dropped by that individual whose hand she had touched and whose moan she had heard? was there indeed any doubt as to such being the case? Terror-stricken as she had been at first, she did not now entertain the idea that it was a preternatural visitant whom she had encountered on that sofa: but was he not the intruder whom she had sought—the Countess of Castlemaine's paramour?

Ah! then he must indeed love her very much that he thus perseveringly sought the suite of apartments where she lay, and that he actually brought with him one of her own letters—a letter which perhaps he had kept treasured next to his heart! But was he, after all, unaware of the very serious nature of her illness? did he come to reproach her for an imgined want of affection? had he brought this letter with him to remind her of the assurances of love which at some time she had vouchsafed? and was he, on making his stealthy entrance into that room, so overcome by his feelings that he had found himself compelled to find his way to the sofa to sit down and calm them?

Such was the series of rapid questions which Mrs. Broughton asked herself, as she still stood with the letter in one hand and the wax-light in the other. And then, too, another query suggested itself. How was it that when the intruder had suddenly felt her hand come in contact with his own, he had not abruptly started up in terror of discovery, instead of giving vent to that deep sound of lamentation? That he had quickly after made a retreat, was evident enough: but what must he have thought of the contact of that hand? whose must he have supposed it to be? and what would his feelings be—what would he do, when he came to discover that the letter had been left behind?

There was much in the whole occurrence which Mrs. Broughton could not understand, and which seemed to be involved in some degree of mystery. But this letter which had so strangely fallen into her possession, and which afforded another corroboration of the Countess of Castlemaine's guilt—what could she do with it? Her first impulse was to burn it: on second thoughts, however, she resolved to keep it, so that if under any circumstances it should be asked for, she might produce it, and thus satisfy those interested in the revelation it contained, that it had not fallen into hands which would make an unworthy use of it. She accordingly concealed it about her person; and then retraced her way into the bed-chamber. She experienced no other adventure on this night; and when relieved from her vigil by the appearance of the nurse, betook herself to her own chamber, where she still pondered for some little time on what had occurred ere sleep visited her eyes.

On the following day the Countess of Castlemaine's condition was so much improved, that Dr. Ferney, when he called, assured Mrs. Broughton that in a very short time her ladyship would again become conscious of what was passing around her. On the night that followed, nothing particular occurred, though Mrs. Broughton kept watch: no tell-tale sound met her ears—there was no intrusion. The next day the Countess was still better; and for a few minutes she evidently recognised Mrs. Broughton, though she was unable to utter an intelligible word. The next ensuing night passed like the preceding one, without intrusion; and the worthy lady's-maid thought to herself that in consequence of the loss of the letter, the Countess's paramour did not dare again venture within those walls,—not knowing into whose hands it had fallen, or what ambush might be laid to entrap him. On the following day Lady Castlemaine, on awaking from a long and refreshing slumber, appeared to have entirely recovered the possession of her intellect, with the faculties of reason and discrimination. Mrs. Broughton was alone in the chamber at the time that the Countess thus woke up. At first the invalid gazed long and earnestly upon her faithful dependant: then she stretched forth her hand, as if perfectly conscious that she had been the object of the kindest and most unwearied ministrations; and for some minutes she retained Mrs. Broughton's hand in her own. But still she spoke not, though her eyes seemed to ask many questions which the brain was suggesting. Closing those eyes for several minutes, the Countess pressed her hand to her brow, and was evidently exerting all her power to collect her ideas and to steady her thoughts. The compassionate Mrs. Broughton felt a sad tightening at the heart; for she knew that the period for explanations was at hand, and her ladyship must soon become aware—even if she were not already thinking of it—that her condition in the way of maternity was known to her husband.

"Broughton," said the Countess, in a faint weak voice, as she slowly removed her hand from her

brow, and gazed up at the lady's-maid with those dark eyes which were always of a soft melancholy, but which were now more plaintively mournful than ever,—"I have been very ill, have I not? Pray tell me how long."

"You must not excite yourself, my lady," responded Mrs. Broughton; but knowing that with invalids it is always better to relieve them from suspense as speedily as possible, she added, "Do not be frightened—but you have been ill for several weeks—indeed altogether more than two months."

"So long as that," murmured the Countess, and once more did she fall into silent reflection.

The lady's-maid stood contemplating that countenance which, though pale and wan with illness, was still so beautiful, and to which that very illness had imparted an expression of the most touching interest; and it really seemed difficult to believe in her guilt, if that fair face were to be regarded as a true index of the mind. But on the other hand, in the presence of all the circumstances which crowded upon Mrs. Broughton's memory, how could she possibly believe the Countess to be innocent?

"Tell me," said her ladyship, again speaking in her low faint voice, but with a visible suspense and anxiety upon her face, "what has been the matter with me?—tell me everything that you think may interest me—do not make me talk too much—you yourself can judge whatsoever I may desire to know."

"Perhaps your ladyship does not remember," said Mrs. Broughton, "how you were suddenly taken ill on returning from the Duke of Harcourt's?"

"Yes—I do recollect it now," observed the Countess.

"Ladies, you know," continued Mrs. Broughton, "when in a particular situation are liable to such attacks——But your ladyship did not tell me of your condition——"

"No: I did not—I did not," said the Countess, with a strange look, which it did Mrs. Broughton harm to behold: for it appeared to be the evidence of conscious guilt. "The Earl——"

And then the Countess stopped short, and a blush appeared upon the cheeks that a moment before were so colourless and pale.

"His lordship seemed much astonished," continued Mrs. Broughton; "for he assisted me to disapparel your ladyship on that night you were seized with such a sudden illness. Dr. Ferney was instantaneously sent for——"

"What must he think? what must they both think?" murmured the Countess, as if in a dying voice, but the accents of which were audible to her dependant. "Go on, Broughton—go on," she said with a visible shudder: but the next moment a strange expression of mingled placidity and firmness appeared upon her countenance—an expression such as an innocent person might be expected to assume; or which, on the other hand, might be put on by a guilty one when suddenly taking a resolve to meet a crisis with a bold effrontery.

"His lordship has visited this chamber every day," continued Mrs. Broughton, —"sometimes twice."

"Thank heaven! God be thanked!" murmured the Countess: and now her features were lighted up with the radiance of exultation. "Has he looked kind? has he spoken kindly?" she asked: but the next instant appearing angry with herself that she had put such questions, she hastily added, "Of course he has—of course he has! He is my husband—he feels for me. He has visited the chamber—sometimes twice a day, you said, Broughton—did you not?—sometimes twice a day?"

"Yes, my lady," was the response.

"Go on—tell me anything else you think I may be interested in knowing. More than two months' illness, and to be unconscious all the time——Oh, it is such a blank to fill up! and so many circumstances may have happened! so much may occur in such a space!——But who has sat up with me at night?"

It struck Mrs. Broughton that the Countess, as she somewhat abruptly put this question, surveyed her with a peculiar and penetrating look, as if she were deeply conscious of the possibility—aye more—the *probability*, that there had been intrusions of a suspicious character in that suite of apartments. It was natural that Mrs. Broughton, knowing what she did, should thus interpret that look on Priscilla's part: but she hesitated for a few moments whether to touch upon so delicate and disagreeable a topic on the present occasion. She feared to excite the invalid who was so weak and feeble, and who she thought had already been talking too much. But as she cast her looks rapidly upon the Countess, she saw that her features expressed an evident suspense; and she was therefore led to the conclusion that it would perhaps be more prudent to tell her at once what must be told sooner or later, and which so long as it remained untold, would only be keeping her ladyship's mind in a state of anxiety and uncertainty. In short Mrs. Broughton considered it to be best to put her ladyship out of suspense as soon as possible.

"A nurse has been engaged to assist me and the maids in attending upon your ladyship: but I," added Mrs. Broughton pointedly, "have considered it to be my duty to watch in your ladyship's room for the first portion of the night."

"You are very good, Broughton," replied the Countess: then fixing her eyes earnestly on her dependant, she said in a firmer voice than before, "I know you have something to tell me—I see that there is something on your mind. You need not maintain any reserve."

"Well, I am glad your ladyship affords me this opportunity of speaking frankly," rejoined Mrs. Broughton. "The truth is, I have been sorely troubled—rendered very uneasy, and even alarmed——"

"Do not use any prefatory remarks," interrupted the Countess: "tell me candidly at once what it is that has troubled and alarmed you:"—and again were the eyes of Lady Castlemaine fixed earnestly and penetratingly upon her dependant.

"Ah, my lady!" said the latter, in a low voice but full of emotion, "surely, surely you can conjecture the cause of that uneasiness and apprehension? you do not wish me to be thoroughly explicit, and enter into minute details?"

"I wish you, Broughton," replied the Countess, "to be as explicit as truth requires, and as if you were telling me something which you have no reason to suppose that I can either foresee or suspect:"—and again was there a remarkable firmness in Pris-

cilla's voice, and a strange expression of courageous resolve in her looks.

"Your ladyship commands—and I obey," replied Mrs. Broughton. "Instrusive steps have penetrated into your ladyship's suite of apartments—I have heard them—twice have I caught a glimpse of the figure of some gentleman——"

"And that gentleman?" said the Countess, with a most singular and incomprehensible look; while, at the same time, the carnation tinge again appeared upon the cheeks that illness had left so pale.

"I know not who he is, my lady," answered Mrs. Broughton: "but I endeavoured to obtain an opportunity of speaking to him. Do not imagine that it was through any impertinent curiosity on my part: for I was pained and afflicted——Oh, I cannot tell you how much!—and I was anxious to warn that gentleman of his imprudence—his rashness—his most unjustifiable indiscretion——excuse these harsh terms——"

"Yes—I can excuse them," said her ladyship: and still again was the expression of her countenance so singular that Mrs. Broughton knew not how to interpret it. "But do not be pained and afflicted on my account——"

"Ah! my lady, if you have indeed resolved that for the future," exclaimed Mrs. Broughton, "there shall be no more of——"

"Spare unnecessary observations," interrupted the Countess: "I have already told you not to make me talk too much. But the nurse and the maids—were they aware of the presence of that intruder, as you have denominated him?"

"No—heaven forbid!" ejaculated Mrs. Broughton warmly.

"Then I am of course to understand that you have not mentioned the circumstance to any one—that the Earl——"

"Again I say, heaven forbid!" cried the good woman, more and more bewildered what to think of the strangeness of her lady's manner, but fearing that it arose from the hardihood of a depravity which had been so long glossed over by the impenetrable veil of dissimulation.

"I know full well, my dear Broughton," resumed the Countess, looking steadily up from her pillow at her dependant, "that all these things must appear very strange to you, and very suspicious: but I beseech you not to think ill of me."

Mrs. Broughton made no reply. She was a woman of truth: she could not give a satisfactory answer to the Countess of Castlemaine's remark—and she did not choose to put forth an evasion or a falsehood.

"I see that you do suspect me—yes, you suspect me!" exclaimed her ladyship, now displaying a sudden excitement. "But however, no matter—you will soon think very differently. I must not talk any longer now: I fear that I have already been speaking too much."

"You have—you have," said Mrs. Broughton. "Let me entreat that your ladyship will compose yourself to slumber, if possible."

The Countess gave no answer: the tears were now trickling from her eyes—and she raised her kerchief to her face. Mrs. Broughton was melted at the sight; but fearful that if she said another word to prolong the discourse it would only cause the invalid to experience a relapse, she turned away from the couch. A few minutes afterwards she approached it gently again, and perceived that the invalid slept—or at least that her eyes were closed, and the expression of her countenance was calm and tranquil as if slumber enwrapped her.

Mrs. Broughton sat herself down to reflect upon the dialogue which had just taken place; and when she thought of those peculiar looks which the Countess had fixed upon her, and that singularity of expression which her features had three or four times worn, she felt bewildered—she knew not what to think—she saw that there was some mystery which yet remained to be fathomed. Could it be possible that, after all, the Countess was innocent? On the other hand, how could this innocence be reconciled with all the circumstances which had come to Mrs. Broughton's knowledge? Even if the intrusion of the unknown were altogether put out of the question, had not the Earl himself proclaimed his wife's frailty and his own dishonour? Therefore, whatsoever mystery there might be to clear up, how was it possible for the purity of the Countess of Castlemaine to be made apparent? She was in a way to become a mother—of *this* there was no doubt: the Earl had accused her of guilt in his apostrophe to her when she slept—*this* was also an established fact. How, then, could she be innocent?

While Mrs. Broughton was thus giving way to her reflections, the Earl of Castlemaine entered the bed-chamber. The quick look which he flung towards the couch, showed him that his wife slept; and then in a whispering voice he asked Mrs. Broughton whether her condition, physically and mentally, was still improving.

"Her ladyship is much better, my lord," responded the woman, likewise speaking in a low whisper; "and she has conversed with me for at least half-an-hour in the most rational and collected manner. But becoming exhausted, her ladyship soon sank off into that slumber which she is enjoying now."

The Earl appeared to reflect for a few moments, and then abruptly beckoned Mrs. Broughton to follow him into the boudoir,—where, looking her full in the face, he said in a somewhat peremptory manner, "Have the goodness to tell me what has passed between her ladyship and yourself."

"I must beg your lordship to understand," was Mrs. Broughton's firm reply, "that I am averse at any time to repeat conversations."

"But in the present instance," said the Earl, evidently staggered by this unexpected response, "you will see the necessity——"

"My lord," rejoined Mrs. Broughton, "I can see no necessity to mix myself up in the private affairs of my master and mistress."

The Earl bit his lip, and a dark scowl appeared upon his countenance: for a moment, too, he bent a menacing look upon the lady's-maid—but though her demeanour was perfectly respectful and totally devoid of effrontery, she displayed no signs of being intimidated. Lord Castlemaine turned abruptly away, and passed once more into the bed-chamber. Mrs. Broughton did not on this occasion follow him thither. It naturally occurred to her that as he had endeavoured to seek certain explanations at her hands, but had received them not—he was now bent on obtaining them from his wife when she

should awake. At such a scene she did not choose to be present. So she sat herself down in the boudoir; and as the two assistant-damsels almost immediately made their appearance, to see if their services were required, she bade them withdraw for the present.

But let us follow the Earl of Castlemaine into her ladyship's chamber. He approached the bed, in which she was still slumbering tranquilly Whether it were in consequence of returning health, or from a lingering excitement in her soul after the conversation with Mrs. Broughton, we cannot say: but certain it is there was the slight tint of the rose upon her cheeks—not hectic—it was delicate and gradually merging into the surrounding marble fairness of the complexion. She looked sweetly beautiful—touchingly, pathetically interesting. The dark fringes of the eyelids rested upon the cheeks: the lips, slightly apart as the regular respirations came through them, afforded a glimpse of the pearly teeth between their coral lines;—while the condition of the drapery partially displayed a bosom as white as snow.

The Earl gazed upon the countenance of his wife with a mingling of mournfulness and rancour in his looks. He seemed to deplore that fall from virtue which he felt had dishonoured and outraged him: but not a word escaped his lips. Nor is it possible to analyse the feelings which were then agitating in the heart of that man whose countenance so seldom betrayed what was passing in his soul—and when it did, betrayed so little. Suddenly the Countess opened her eyes wide, and with a slight but quick movement of the form, as if startled from some dream into complete wakefulness.

"Stephen—dearest Stephen!" she cried, extending her arms towards him: but as if seized with an unconquerable loathing and disgust, he turned quickly away and fled from the chamber.

He passed rapidly through the boudoir without appearing to notice that Mrs. Broughton was there; and she, immediately supposing that her mistress was awake and that something unpleasant had occurred between them, re-entered the bed-chamber. The Countess was weeping—her kerchief was to her eyes—and she did not at once perceive that her faithful dependant had returned to the room. But suddenly wiping away her tears, and now noticing Mrs. Broughton's presence, she said, "Give me my writing-desk—I must pen a few lines to the Earl."

"My lady, it is impossible!" responded Mrs. Broughton: "you are too weak—this excitement will be the death of your ladyship!"

"No, no," she said impatiently: "I shall be strong enough to write a few lines—only a few lines! I insist that you give me my desk."

Still Mrs. Broughton hesitated: but the Countess repeated her order with so much hysterical petulance, that the worthy woman thought she would be doing more harm by the refusal than with the compliance. She accordingly fetched the writing-desk from the boudoir; and opening it, placed it on the bed in the most convenient manner for the Countess to make use of it. Her ladyship endeavoured to raise herself from the pillow—but sank back exhausted. Again, at the expiration of a few minutes—and notwithstanding her attendant's earnest remonstrances—she made another attempt, but could not succeed. Then a film appeared to come over her eyes; and raising her hand to her brow, she said, "I feel faint and ill—I cannot write—hasten you to the Earl—and tell him——"

But she could not terminate the sentence: the effort she had made to rise had overpowered her—and she fell into a deep swoon.

For three days the Countess of Castlemaine experienced a complete relapse, both physically and mentally; and it was not till the fourth morning that consciousness again returned, and that she regained the command of her mental faculties.

CHAPTER CXI.

CHIFFIN'S NARRATIVE.

It was about ten o'clock at night, that Chiffin the Cannibal entered a low public-house in one of the vilest streets in Spitalfields. He was evidently well known to the man who kept this boosing-ken; and after exchanging with him a few words of familiar greeting, he passed into a private room at the back part of the premises. Some liquor he had ordered was served up; and having lighted his pipe, he patiently awaited the arrival of a person whom he expected to meet him there. Nor was he kept waiting long: for in about five minutes the door opened, and Tony Wilkins made his appearance.

"Well," demanded the Cannibal, "what have you brought?"

"Nothink," was the reply. "Old Sol says there is never a letter for you come to the *Goat*."

"This is deuced odd," said Chiffin, in a musing tone: "she promised she would write to me—and she's too good a customer for me to let slip through my hands."

"Who are you speaking of?" asked Tony Wilkins.

"Never do you trouble yourself," was the Cannibal's growling response: but as the reader may suppose, he had Lady Saxondale in his mind. "And old Sol says that there's no letter come for me, does he?"

"That's what he says," rejoined Wilkins, who had also lighted his pipe, and had tasted the liquor with which the Cannibal was treating him. "He told me as how he had heerd from you, and that I was to come and meet you at this here place and at this here hour. So here I be."

"I wonder whether that old Sol is humbugging or not," said Chiffin, again speaking in a musing manner. "But no—he can't be: the letter would be of no use to him—and though I'm under a cloud just now, it will soon blow over; and so as I shall be able to visit the *Goat* again, he wouldn't dare play me any trick."

"I don't know that," said Wilkins. "I have never had much of an opinion of Solomon Patch. Money is all he cares about."

"To be sure," observed Chiffin; "and he would do anything for the blunt. But so would we all. And what does he say about the detectives?"

"He says that it wouldn't be safe for you to come near the *Goat* yet; as he is quite sure that one of them chaps in plain clothes has been looking in at the place three or four times since you did that job about Madge Somers. And I too," continued Tony, after a brief pause, during which he

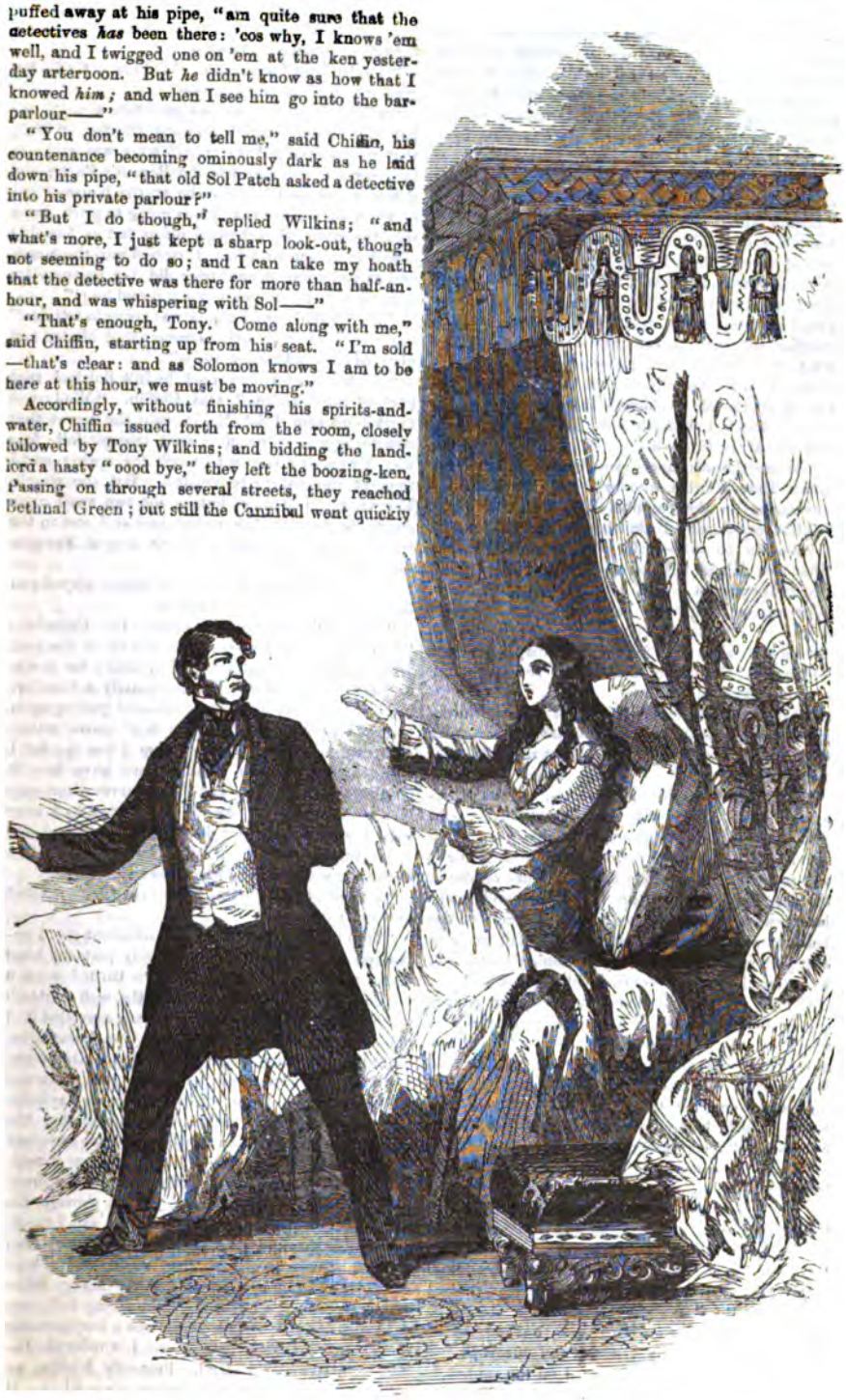
puffed away at his pipe, "am quite sure that the detectives *has* been there: 'cos why, I knows 'em well, and I twigged one on 'em at the ken yesterday arternoon. But *he* didn't know as how that I knowed *him*; and when I see him go into the bar-parlour——"

"You don't mean to tell me," said Chiffin, his countenance becoming ominously dark as he laid down his pipe, "that old Sol Patch asked a detective into his private parlour?"

"But I do though," replied Wilkins; "and what's more, I just kept a sharp look-out, though not seeming to do so; and I can take my hoath that the detective was there for more than half-an-hour, and was whispering with Sol——"

"That's enough, Tony. Come along with me," said Chiffin, starting up from his seat. "I'm sold—that's clear: and as Solomon knows I am to be here at this hour, we must be moving."

Accordingly, without finishing his spirits-and-water, Chiffin issued forth from the room, closely followed by Tony Wilkins; and bidding the landlord a hasty "oood bye," they left the boozing-ken. Passing on through several streets, they reached Bethnal Green; but still the Cannibal went quickly



on, evidently determined to place a considerable distance between himself and the place they had just left. At last he turned into another low public-house, in one of the narrow dirty streets near the old church in the Bethnal Green district; and being known there, as well as at the former boozing-ken, he was speedily accommodated with a private room, where he might discuss matters with Tony Wilkins.

"Now to business," said the Cannibal, when his order for liquor and pipes had been duly attended to. "I know the people are staunch here; and so I needn't be afraid of anything wrong. As I said just now at t'other place it's as clear as daylight that Solomon Patch has nosed upon me. He wouldn't like to do it openly, for fear that some of my pals—you, for instance, amongst them—should do him a mischief in consequence. But depend upon it, he wants to get rid of me; and so he's working in secret. Now I am convinced that the affair about the trap-door was all a planned thing betwixt Madge and old Patch, notwithstanding he did swear black and blue at the time——"

"What the deuce are you talking about?" inquired Tony Wilkins, who for the last few moments was gazing on the Cannibal in unfeigned surprise. "What trap-door? I ain't heard talk of none."

"No—to be sure—I forgot," observed Chiffin: "but now I will tell you all about it. You must know, Tony, that I had a little business to do—a mere matter of getting rid of a couple of swell coves: so I laid a precious nice plant for them. You know when old Sol had the carpenters and builders in the house, pretending to make some repairs and alterations——"

"Yes: and how deuced particular he was," interjected Tony, "in not letting no one go up-stairs or into that scullery-place, while it was all being done."

"Ah! now you will see the dodge of that," rejoined the Cannibal. "It was me that was secretly telling old Solomon what orders to give about keeping his customers away from those rooms: for I was pretty near the whole time up-stairs or else in the scullery shewing the carpenters and bricklayers what they were to do; and the end of the business was that I had as neat a pitfall made as ever you would wish to see in a summer's day. It was a regular picture—quite lovely to look at."

Chiffin was for the moment so lost in admiring contemplation of the ingenious contrivance to which he was alluding, that he forgot his companion Tony was awaiting further explanations on the subject: but being reminded thereof, he proceeded to describe the whole particulars of the pitfall—which, being already known to the reader, we need not recapitulate here.

"Well," he continued, "I let Madge Somers into the secret——"

"Ah!" interrupted Tony, "I was going to ask you what it was you and Madge had quarrelled about: for I always thought you was very friendly together. In course we had all heerd that you had pretty near done her business for her up at some house near the Regency Park, and that the detectives was arter you in consequence: but none of us knowed the reason why you had fell out with her—and old Sol wouldn't say a word on the subject."

"When I think of it," said the Cannibal, "I dare say that old Sol wanted to get rid of Madge too: so he let you bring me the note—that note, you remember, when you come to me at my lodging up in Camden Town——"

"To be sure," responded Wilkins. "Old Sol gived me half a sovereign——"

"Which he took precious good care to make me pay him back again," observed Chiffin. "Well, that note was to tell me that Madge was going to keep some appointment in the Regent's Park; and it struck me that it must be at the house of one of them swell coves that I was going to pitch down into the well. So I bowled off as fast as I could; —and as savage as a lion, I rushed into the house, and as you know, deuced near did her business for her. I wish I had quite—the infernal hag!"

"Well, but about what you was going to tell me?" observed Tony Wilkins: "summut that Madge had planned with old Solomon——"

"To be sure! I forgot—I hadn't finished that part of the business," said Chiffin. "Well, you must know that I let Madge into the secret that something was to be done with that pit-fall: 'cos why, I wanted a person to touch the spring, and I thought she was to be trusted. But she wasn't. The wretch! instead of letting the two swell coves down, she touched the spring just as I was on the trap-door: and it worked like the drop at Newgate underneath my feet."

"You don't mean to say that Madge played you that trick?" cried Tony Wilkins.

"But I do though," answered the Cannibal; "and in a jiffey I was at the bottom of the well. Down I soused, right under the water—for it was at least six foot deep: but fortunately a thundering big stone lay at the bottom—and getting upon this, I was able to keep my head above water. You can fancy the precious rage I was in: for I knew deuced well that Madge must have done it on purpose, as the bolt would have never given way of its own accord. I saw the old wretch look over with the candle in her hand; and I wished she would tumble in. Wouldn't I have held her fast under the water till she was drowned!"

"I should think so, too," observed Tony. "But how did you get out?"

"Stop a bit, and I'll tell you all about it. I remained as still a mouse, with only just my head above water; and I kept my face turned down a bit, so that those who looked into the well mightn't catch a glimpse of it: for I was very sure that if I made any noise, or if it was seen that I was alive, those two gentlemen would have called in the police, and I should have been had off to gaol. I heard Madge talking to them, but couldn't catch a syllable that was said. I was uncommonly afraid that the gentlemen would insist on having the place searched, to see whether it was really all over with me or not: but they didn't. After a little while, I saw both Madge and old Solomon looking down through the trap-door: she had a light in her hand, and I could distinguish them as plain as possible as I just threw a quick glance upward. They were talking too: but I couldn't hear what they said. Madge lifted up the trap door, which caught the spring-bolt, and so remained fixed. Then there was a few minutes' silence and darkness for me; and I wondered how the deuce it would all end. Presently Madge and old Solomon came into the scullery-place where the

well is; and once more did she look down over the brink. I kept as still as death; and I heard what they said."

"Did old Solomon say anything to show that it was all done on purpose and he knowed it?" asked Wilkins.

"I can't say that he did," responded Chiffin: "but very little passed between them at all. Madge asked what was the depth of the well, and how much water there was: and then she told Solomon to help her put some of the flag-stones over the opening. By jingo! that was a precious queer moment for me; and I was a deuced great mind to shout out: but I saw I was completely in their power, and thought I had better trust to chance and remain quiet."

"You *must* have felt queer," observed Tony. "It was like burying one alive."

"I believe you," ejaculated Chiffin. "Well, they took and covered the opening with those flag-stones. I was frightened that they might let one of them slip in—and then perhaps it would have been all up with me; for a gentle rap on the head with a paving-stone tumbling down that height, wouldn't have been a trifle to laugh at. But they did their work neat enough—so neat indeed, that I thought I was done for ever. They went out of the place; and there was I, just for the all the world as if it was at the bottom of a vault in a church, buried alive! It was even worse—for I was up to my chin in water; and though it wasn't particularly cold at first, it wasn't very pleasant. I waited about a quarter of an hour, just to see whether Madge or old Sol would come into the scullery again: for I did not like to make a move if there was a chance of being found out—'cause why, I thought that after all they had done, if they should hear a splashing and so find I was alive, they would heap such a lot of things on the top of the well that I might as well try to move a mountain as to dislodge them. But all remained quiet. So I began to feel about the sides of the well, to find if there was any chance of being able to climb up. Precious lucky for me was it that the brick-work had given way in several places; and so I was able to clamber to the very top. Then, keeping as sure a footing as I could—and uncommon hard work it was—I felt the stones overhead: but my first thought was that I should never be able to move them. I tried to push my fingers betwixt them—but it was no use: and then, lo and behold! some of the brick-work gave way, and I tumbled down to the bottom again, hurting myself confoundedly. I scrambled up on the big stone, and was once more chin-deep in the water. I thought to be sure the splash would be heard in the bar: but no one came into the scullery. Then I asked myself what the devil I was to do, and whether I was to stay there—to fall asleep perhaps, and be drowned like a dog—or to be starved to death. You may be sure that I vowed vengeance upon Madge and old Solomon if I should ever get out—of which however there seemed to be uncommon little chance."

"What a precious plight to be in, to be sure!" said Tony Wilkins. "But go on: it's as good as a story-book."

"Well," continued the Cannibal, "as I was down there—up to the chin in water, and beginning to feel my legs getting numbed with the cold—a thought struck me how to move the stones over the mouth of the well. So taking heart, I climbed up to the top again; and clinging with one hand to the brickwork as I had done before, with t'other hand I took out my clasp-knife, and opened the blade with my teeth. I thrust the blade in between two of the stones, and soon worked the handle up atwixt them also. Then I began to have some little hope; and putting my knife back again into my pocket,—for I thought if I did get out, it should be drawn across old Sol's throat afore morning,—I began to work with my fingers. I could now thrust them in betwixt the stones, till at last I got my hand up—and then my wrist: so you see I was widening the opening. I went on working away: but it was a killing job. I had to keep shifting my hands—first clinging by the right and working with the left—then clinging with the left and working with the right, so as to rest them in their turn. Once too, I was so stiff and tired of hanging up in that style, that I had to climb down again and take a stand in the water for ten minutes to rest myself. Then up I went again—and to work once more! And all this time I could hear the shouts of laughter coming from the tap-room; and I wished I was there, with a jolly good glass of lush and a pipe. However, I succeeded in the long run in getting out of that cursed well; and when I had moved the stones far enough to scramble forth, I fell down on the floor of the scullery, quite exhausted. A child might have killed me then: I could not have offered any resistance. I was so tired that I hadn't the slightest inclination to move. A drowsiness came over me—and I gave myself up to it, as one may say: I was dead beat. So I fell fast asleep; and when I woke up again, I was as cold as ice. Only fancy going to sleep like that, with one's clothes on, dripping wet! All was now quiet in the house; and I heard the clock in the bar strike two. Two in the morning!—and it was a little after nine that I had tumbled into the well: so that you can guess how many hours I had been acquainted with cold water. When I tried to get up, my limbs were as stiff as if they were frozen; and I really thought that I must stay there and die. But I fancied to myself what a sin it was to be beat, after all I had gone through and done—and how uncommon pleasant it would be just to draw my clasp-knife across old Sol's throat, to teach him how to play tricks with his pals again. And then I also thought what an uncommon deal of good a tumbler of raw brandy would do me just at that moment—and the bar where it was kept, so close at hand! In short, I managed to raise myself up, and felt for the scullery-door. It was locked—and that was just as I expected. I had to move about a bit, before I could use my limbs properly: but when once the blood began to circulate, I soon forced open the door. Another moment—and I was in the bar."

"And didn't you help yourself jolly well to the brandy!" exclaimed Tony Wilkins. "I'll be bound you did! I think I should have swigged a whole bottle, if it had been me."

"Well, I did take a pretty decent pull, I can tell you," answered Chiffin; "and it did me a world of good. As luck would have it, there was a little fire left in the bar-parlour: so I lighted a candle which was there, and was able to see what I was about. I found some things to eat—and they also

did me good. Then I took the candle in one hand and my clasp-knife open in the other—and crept up to the bed-room. The door wasn't locked; and I went in. Mrs. Patch was in bed and fast asleep: but Solomon was not there. I didn't exactly know what to do; and while I was thinking, Mother Patch awoke. My eyes! what a start she gave: but I think she was too frightened to cry out. Perhaps she took me for a ghost. Howsomever, I very soon let her know it was no ghost—but honest Chiffin himself: for I told her that her husband had played me a rascally trick, and it was deuced lucky for him I hadn't found him there. She swore black and blue that Solomon was as innocent as a little lamb—that Madge had told him the bolt gave way by accident—and that if he had thought I wasn't drownded in the well, he would have got assistance to pull me out. She begged me not to murder her, and said she knew her husband would do anything he could to make me amends. I asked her where he was; and she said that he was fetched away on very particklar business at about eleven o'clock—that he wouldn't be home all night—for in fact he had gone to Gravesend, where his brother Isaac wanted him. Well, she spoke so fair that I really did begin to think it was possible old Solomon had been humbugged by Madge. I put up my clasp-knife, and told Mrs. Patch that I would see her husband at my own lodging next night—but that neither she or him was on any account to say that I had turned up again, as I meant to let Madge think I was done for—so that she might be thrown off her guard and not get out of the way to escape my vengeance. Then I made Mrs. Patch give me a complete change of rigging from head to foot; and I went down to the bar-parlour to change my things. I can assure you, Tony, that I never felt so comfortable in all my life as when I had dry clothes on."

"I should say so indeed," observed Wilkins. "It's as good as any play I ever saw at a penny gaff. But go on. What did Sol say when you saw him?"

"As soon as I had put on the clean togs, I made the best of my way to my lodging, and went to bed, where I staid for forty-eight hours without ever moving out of it. Old Solomon came at nightfall. He vowed and protested that the account his wife gave me was perfectly true, and that he had firmly believed what Madge told him—that it was all an accident: and he promised to do anything he could to show me how sorry he was. I told him that all I wanted for the present was that if he saw Madge he should keep her in the belief that I was dead and done for; and that he must let me know where I was likely to fall in with her—for she has given up living at her own cottage by the Seven Sisters Road, some time past. He said she was certain sure to be at his house in the evening of the twenty-first of August: but he begged and implored that I wouldn't come and do her a mischief there, as it would only be getting him into trouble. So I told him if he would send me word when she left his house on that night, I would soon be on her track and settle the business. He promised—and he kept his word. That was when you came to me with the note. And now I've no more to tell."

"You went through something on that precious night, Chiffin," said Tony Wilkins.

"Yes—and I felt it for days afterwards—I feel it even now. I must be pretty tough—or else it would have killed me. But I tell you what, Tony,—to go back to what we were saying at t'other boozing-ken,—Sol Patch is selling me to the detectives. There can't be a doubt of it; and if he's false now—why, then he may have been false in the pit-fall affair. Do you think old Sol has got much money in his house?"—and the Cannibal fixed his eyes with a diabolic significancy upon Tony Wilkins as he thus spoke.

"Can't say," responded the younger villain, who fully understood the meaning of that look. "But if you think it worth while——"

"It's worth while for you," said the Cannibal, "if there's any blunt to be got by it; and it's worth while for me even if he had not a penny-piece in the place—cos why, you see, I have now plenty of scores to settle with him. But Solomon we know *is* well off; and though I dare say he don't keep on the premises all he is worth, he must still have something handsome in his cash-box. What say you, Tony? You and I have done some business together afore now: shall we do this?"

Wilkins reflected for a few minutes; and at length he said, looking very hard at the Cannibal, "Yes—I will do it along with you."

"Then let's shake hands over it," said Chiffin; and they shook hands accordingly. "I tell you what," continued the elder ruffian, "something has struck me. I should like to know exactly how far old Solomon has gone with the detectives: because, you see, he knows of that little business of mine in the barge——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Tony: "then that was your work—eh? Well, I'm blowed if I didn't always suspect it was."

"To be sure," replied Chiffin, with a grim smile. "I ain't going to have any secrets with you now that we're going to work so comfortable and pleasant together. You see, from a certain inquiry that I got some one to make in the neighbourhood of Deveril's house yesterday, I learn that Madge Somers is certain to recover: and so if I was took up on account of *that*, it wouldn't be a hanging case—only a transportation business. But if for t'other affair——"

"The barge business?" said Wilkins inquiringly.

"Yes: if that was made known—why, then I should be booked—and no mistake," added the Cannibal, as another grim smile appeared upon his diabolical countenance. "Now, if old Solomon is really in communication with the detectives, he may have whispered a word about the barge business; and altogether it would be best to find out exactly how far he has gone towards betraying me. Couldn't you, Tony, manage somehow or another to worm yourself into his confidence? You might pretend that you had a spite against me—or that one of the detectives has been speaking to you, and that you feel rather inclined to tumble into their plans and give me over to their keeping. If you did this—and did it *well*, mind—old Sol would be thrown off his guard: he would tell you what's being done—he would perhaps propose that you should be the chap to give me up to the beaks——"

"I understand," said Wilkins: "and I'll do it if you like."

"Well, let it be so," resumed Chiffin. "And there's another advantage to be gained by your playing this part: you can get old Solomon to let you stay at the *Goat* to-morrow night—you can pretend that you want to talk over matters with him after the place is shut up and all the people are gone—and then, at about one in the morning, you could quietly open the door and let me in. We should then know how to do the rest."

Wilkins, who always suffered himself to be swayed entirely by the Cannibal, consented to these suggestions; and the two ruffians continued the farther discussion of their plans, together with fresh supplies of liquor. They did not separate until a late hour, a thorough understanding being established as to the entire mode of procedure.

CHAPTER CXII.

TONY WILKINS.

It was about six o'clock in the evening of the following day that Tony Wilkins made his appearance at the *Billy Goat;* and passing by the bar without taking the least notice of old Patch or his wife, he strode onward with sullen looks into the tap-room. The dirty lad who served as pot-boy and waiter, followed him in, to receive whatsoever commands he had to issue; and Wilkins, having ordered some liquor and a pipe, told the lad in a savage voice to "make himself scarce," as he wanted to be alone; for there was no one else in the room at the time. Old Patch,—having observed Tony's sullen looks, and hearing from the pot boy in what an ill temper he appeared to be,—thought there was something strange in all this, and determined, if possible, to find out what it was. So, taking a glass of liquor in his hand, he went into the tap-room, sat himself down at the same table with Tony Wilkins, and made some casual remark. Tony answered in an abrupt and half-savage manner—and then appeared to relapse into a train of disagreeable reflections.

"Why, what ails you, Tony?" asked old Solomon. "You seem altogether out of sorts this evening. Is things going wrong—or how?"

"Things is well enough," responded Wilkins: "but I'll be hanged if I'll put up any longer with that feller's brutal humours."

"What feller's? who do you mean?" asked Solomon.

"Who the deuce should I mean, but Chiffin?" replied Tony, still in a half-sullen, half-savage manner. "And by the bye, I don't at all thank you for sending me on a message to him last night. He growled like a bear with a sore head when I told him as how there was never a letter for him; and he went on at me just for all the world as if it was my fault that his letters hadn't come. Then he told me to meet him somewhere again this arternoon, as he wanted to speak to me. So I went just now: but because I was a trifle late at the place of appintment, he blackguarded me in a way I couldn't stand. So I come off, and left him to his humours."

"Ah!" observed old Solomon, "you are not the only one, Tony, that is afeard of Chiffin the Cannibal. I have been a many years at the *Goat*, and during the time have seen a many rum customers: but hang me if ever I met a feller like Chiffin. One doesn't dare say one's soul is his own where he be."

"You're right enow, Sol," responded Tony. "But I've done with him. I'm blowed if he shall bully me any more. I tell you what it is, Sol—I've stood more at different times from that man than from any other; and now it all seems to have gathered in one great spite, if you understand what I mean ——But I'm a cursed fool to talk this way afore you," cried Tony, suddenly checking himself: "'cause why, you're such a intimate friend of Chiffin's."

"Softly, softly, my young feller," observed old Solomon: then, fixing a peculiar look upon Wilkins, he added, "Not so much of a friend perhaps to Chiffin as you seem to think. Didn't I say a minute back that he *will* be lord and master wheresumever he is? and this don't always suit. Besides, I don't mind telling you, Tony, that I think Chiffin's day is pretty nigh over: he has had a uncommon long run of it—a wonderful run—more than twenty year, to my knowledge."

"Well, if his day is nigh over," observed Wilkins, "the sooner the better, say I—and that's all about it."

"But I dare say this spite of your'n will wear off," resumed Solomon, after a pause: and again he looked very hard at Wilkins, as if to penetrate into his very soul. "Yes—it will wear off; and you'll be as friendly again as ever with Chiffin."

"Never!" ejaculated Tony, striking his clenched fist forcibly upon the table. "Him and me are now two—and I mean we shall keep so. Why, you don't think, Sol—do you—that I am going to be bullied, and baited, and kicked about by that feller? If you think so, you're uncommon mistaken. No: I'd sooner go and give him up——"

But here Tony checked himself once more: indeed he stopped completely short—and then gazed in a sort of consternation upon Solomon Patch, as if fearful that he had said something that might be repeated again and draw down upon his head the terrific vengeance of the Cannibal.

"You needn't look at me like that," observed the old man: "I sha'n't peach agin you. So far from that, I think that perhaps you and I seem to be more of a mind on the matter than you may suppose."

"What d'ye mean?" asked Wilkins, now appearing to eye the old landlord very keenly in his turn.

"I mean this," responded Patch—"that I am as sick and tired of Chiffin as you can be—and what's more, I think that he would be a good riddance. I only wish that he'd never set foot in the *Goat* again; and I don't think I should break my heart if he was safe locked up in the Stone Jug."

"Well, since you speak so frank and candid," replied Wilkins, "I don't mind telling you that he *was* deuced near getting locked up just now."

"As how?" asked Solomon: and he drew closer to Tony Wilkins—for their discourse was every instant becoming more significant and confidential.

"Why, after Chiffin had bullied and baited me so just now, 'cause I was a trifle late," answered Wilkins, "I was so precious wild and savage that I was more than half inclined to go and let the beaks know where he might be picked up."

"Ah! you thought of doing that—did you?"

observed Solomon: then, after a few moments' pause, he demanded abruptly, "And why didn't you do it?"

"Well, I don't rightly know," responded Tony. "One doesn't make up one's mind to them kind of things in a hurry: so I come here to think over it."

"You know there's summut to be got by it—don't you?" asked Solomon, now eyeing Wilkins askance.

"About Madge Somers's business, I suppose?" said Tony interrogatively.

"Just so. There's a hundred guineas. How should you like to have fifty, Tony!"

"Uncommon well—and there's no mistake about it."

"And you wouldn't flinch when it came to the pint? you wouldn't think of it? you are sure you wouldn't, Tony?"

"Not I indeed! why should I? I've come to hate Chiffin—and so would you too, if you'd been called all the names he called me just now and last night. Human natur' can't stand it, Sol."

"To be sure not," rejoined the old landlord, inwardly chuckling as he flattered himself he had thus far drawn Wilkins out so very cleverly: "to be sure not! But if you're raly in right down earnest and will give Chiffin up, I'll introduce you to-morrow to somebody that will arrange the whole matter with you:—and then of course it must be an understood thing that you and me is to share the reward—though I'm to keep altogether in the background, and you must never let it out to a soul that I had anythink to do in the business."

"Not I," responded Wilkins. "You know, Sol, you can depend upon what I say. So it's a bargain. But who's this person you are going to introduce me to to-morrow?"

"Who should it be," said the old landlord with a sly look, "but somebody as wants Chiffin?"

"A detective, I suppose?" interjected Wilkins.

"Well, that's about the mark," returned Solomon. "You needn't be afeard to look the genelman in the face: he doesn't want you for nothink."

"And it's only about Madge's business, then, that Chiffin his-self is wanted?" said Wilkins after a pause. "Why, if Madge recovers, it won't perhaps be more than a transportation case——unless you have let out anything about t'other affair——"

"What other affair?" inquired Solomon hurriedly.

"Why, the barge business," answered Wilkins.

"Ah! then you know as how that was Chiffin's affair? And how come you to know it?"

"Why, Chiffin his-self told me: he didn't make no secret of it."

"But *you* must, Tony—*you* must," was Solomon's hasty and anxious rejoinder. "Not a word to the detective on that score—not a syllable! Don't you see, we might get took up as accessories after the fact on account of knowing it and not giving information. That's the law, Tony: so take care of yourself."

"Thank ye for the advice—I shan't neglect it, you may be sure. But what time will this detective genelman be here to-morrow?"

"When and where do you think you could fall in with Chiffin again?" demanded Solomon: "'cause why, it mustn't be at any of his haunts that's knowed to me—I mustn't seem to have anythink to do in it—that's our agreement, you know."

"To be sure—all right enough!" answered Wilkins. "I can see Chiffin any time I like to-morrow."

"Well then, it can be done early:"—and after a few moments' reflection, the landlord added, "The detective shall be here at nine o'clock in the morning: there's no one about then to take any perticklar notice. And I tell you what, Tony—the best thing you could do would be to sleep here to-night. I will give you a bed and a good breakfast in the morning; and all things considered, it would be much better—'cause why, you'll be on the spot quite handy, to see the detective when he comes in the morning—and there won't be no waiting or bother of that sort."

"Well, I don't mind," observed Wilkins: "but I have got an appintment with my young o'oman at nine o'clock——"

"You must put it off, Tony," interrupted Solomon in a peremptory manner: "you must stay here altogether till you've settled things with the detective. You can order as much lush, and bak-ker, and what not, as you like: I'll stand treat—and a good supper of tripe and inguns into the bargain."

"That's business-like," said Wilkins; "and it's fort'nate I told my young o'oman to meet me just over the canal-bridge at nine o'clock: so I can run out for a minute and stall her off till to-morrow."

"You can do that: but mind, you mustn't be more than five minutes away. You promise?"

"Yes, to be sure—if you wish it."

"Hush! there's chaps a-coming—we won't be seen whispering together."

Thereupon Solomon Patch emptied his glass, and rose to quit the room, just as several of its regular frequenters made their appearance,—their approach having been heralded by some boisterous outburst of merriment in front of the bar. Thither did Solomon return, chuckling inwardly at the arrangement he had effected with Tony Wilkins, whom he purposed to keep as much as possible under his own eye till the morning, for fear lest if he went out he might perchance fall in with the Cannibal, and be deterred from his purpose either by compunctious feelings of his own, or a return to good humour on the part of that individual. But on *his* side, Tony Wilkins was also chuckling inwardly, for reasons which are obvious enough.

At nine o'clock Tony quitted the *Billy Goat*; and having assured himself that he was not followed, hurried away across the bridge, and descended to the towing-path of the canal, where Chiffin was waiting for him. Their conversation was brief and hurried; and when they separated, Tony Wilkins sped back to the boozing-ken, receiving a significant nod of approbation from Solomon Patch as he passed the bar; for he had not been altogether more than ten minutes absent, and the old landlord was well pleased at what he considered to be a proof of deference and good faith on the young ruffian's part. Re-entering the tap-room, Tony continued to smoke and drink at Solomon's expense: and the promised supper was not forgotten. The orgie on the part of the frequenters was kept up as usual until past midnight; and when the

house was cleared of all save the regular inmates and Tony Wilkins, preparations were made for retiring to rest. A little crib of a bed-room on the same floor as Solomon's own, was assigned to Tony; and by one o'clock a complete silence prevailed throughout the dwelling.

Tony did not undress: but he put out his candle in order to avoid creating any suspicion of an evil design. He sat down on the bed—and thus waited for at least three quarters of an hour. Then he took off his shoes; and gently opening the door of his room, listened with suspended breath. Not a sound met his ears: but for full five minutes did he remain listening. Then he began to descend the stairs, very slowly and very carefully,—pausing, too, on every step, for the wood-work made a slight creaking noise. But no one appeared to be disturbed; and he reached the ground-floor. He was now in the open space in front of the bar; and being quite familiar with every feature of the establishment, he had no difficulty in reaching the street-door without stumbling against any object, though utter darkness prevailed. It was easy to draw back the bolts and unfasten the chain: but, as had been foreseen, the door was locked, and the key had been removed—most probably taken up-stairs to the room where the landlord and his wife slept. Drawing forth from his pocket a small crow-bar, or "jemmy," not more than a foot and a half long, and sharp as well as thin at one extremity, Tony Wilkins began to operate on the lock; and this proceeding was conducted so noiselessly and at the same time so skilfully, that in less than five minutes the lock came off in his hand, and no one in the house was disturbed. The door was now opened; and Chiffin the Cannibal entered the place.

The instant the door was closed again, the elder ruffian produced a dark lantern from his pocket; and it was promptly lighted. Then the two villains exchanged rapid looks; and while on the one hand Chiffin assured himself that Wilkins was resolute, the latter perceived an expression of a savage desire for vengeance on the countenance of the other. They spoke not a word: they had nothing to say—their plans were already settled—they had now only to execute them. Chiffin took off his heavy boots; and leading the way, he began the ascent of the narrow staircase, closely followed by his accomplice.

The rooms up-stairs had been restored to their original condition,—that where the trap-door was formed, being once more used as a sleeping chamber for the landlord and his wife. On reaching the threshold of this room, Chiffin passed the lantern to Tony Wilkins, and then cautiously tried the handle of the door: but, as he had expected, it was locked. He immediately drew forth from his pocket a small crow-bar, similar to that which the younger ruffian had already rendered serviceable; and this the Cannibal used with so much promptitude and dexterity, as well as force, that the door was burst open in a moment. Patch and his wife both started up from the sound sleep in which they were wrapped at the time: but almost before a single sound of alarm had issued from their lips, Chiffin threw himself upon them, and his hands were at once forced upon their mouths in such a manner that they could not cry out. The next proceeding followed quick as thought; and it was horrible too—most horrible. For Tony Wilkins with his own crow-bar dealt Patch a terrific blow on the head; and the next instant the same murderous weapon crashed upon the skull of the woman. The Cannibal, now having his hands free, drew forth his ghastly clasp-knife, and made the murderous work still more sure by cutting the throats of the two victims.

All this was done in an incredibly short space of time: it was the work of but a few moments. Yes: a few moments sufficed to hurry two beings into the other world! And it was done so noiselessly too, that when the murderers listened at the chamber-door, they caught no sound to lead them to believe that the pot-boy or the female-servant whom the Patches kept, had been disturbed. As for the spectacle which the bed now presented, it was hideous and ghastly: husband and wife—that old man and that old woman—lay side by side,—their heads beaten in, their throats frightfully gashed, the sheet and coverlid stained with the blood which had spirted forth and was continuing to flow profusely. But little recked the principal assassin for the horror of the sight: while on the other hand the younger one was all in the tremor of fevered excitement—as this was the first blood he had ever seen shed. His face, too, was ghastly pale; and indeed, scarcely was the crime accomplished, when he wished it undone.

"Come, Tony," said Chiffin, speaking in a low whisper, for fear of alarming the servants, "don't stand shivering and shuddering there—but let's look out for the spoil. Here, my lad—take a drop of this."

Tony Wilkins eagerly snatched the brandy-flask which the Cannibal presented to him; and he drank with avidity a portion of its contents. The fiery fluid seemed to circulate like lightning through his veins, giving him the courage which he had all on a sudden lost immediately after the perpetration of the crime. A grim smile expanded itself on Chiffin's countenance, as he saw by the light of the lantern the alteration which was all in a moment effected by the potent alcohol in respect to his companion: and then he took a long draught himself. They now began to search the drawers, the cupboards, and the trunks. The cash-box was speedily discovered: but its contents did not exceed twenty pounds.

"There must be more somewhere," growled Chiffin: and the search was continued.

A few articles of jewellery, of insignificant value, and with which Mrs. Patch had been wont to adorn her person on Sundays and on holidays, were discovered in one of the drawers: but no more money. As for plate, there was none,—no articles of silver being used at the *Billy Goat*. The garments of the murdered victims were next searched: but only a few shillings were found in the pockets. There was Solomon Patch's watch—an old silver one, of the description known as the "turnip" kind; and there was likewise a breast-pin, but of little value. Every nook and corner of the chamber was carefully examined: still no more money, either in gold or bank-notes, appeared to be forthcoming. The Cannibal suggested that the mattresses should be ripped open—a proposal to which Tony Wilkins at once assented: for the thought that so tremendous a crime had been perpetrated for so poor a profit as

Chiffin stopped short, irresolute for a moment how to act: indeed, he was suddenly dismayed by this bursting forth of a posse of persons from the house in question. The gloom of the hour was quite sufficient to save him from recognition, had no artificial light been used: but all in a moment one of the policemen, drawing back the shade of his lantern, flashed the light of his bull's-eye full on the ruffian's countenance.

"'Tis Chiffin!" was the cry instantaneously raised by half-a-dozen voices: staves were drawn—and there was a quick rush towards him.

His club—an invariable companion of the Cannibal's—instantaneously struck down the foremost of the officers: but his way across the bridge was barred—and he had no alternative but to dash along the road, which had a row of houses on one side and the parapet of the canal-wall on the other. The officers were close at his heels; he tore along at a furious pace: it was indeed for life or death. His presence in Agar Town at that precise time would not fail to be connected with the double murder at the boosing-ken, when the crime should be discovered; and if brought home to him, his path to the gibbet would be inevitable. His position was therefore desperate: and desperate was the thought that flashed to his brain. But what was this? In a few moments we will explain it. He might have turned off into any of the diverging streets: but his capture would be certain—for the officers were gaining upon him. He might lead them a dance amidst the mazes of Agar Town: but they could disperse themselves—and he must fall into their hands. He could turn and fight desperately—he had pistols in his pocket—he had a crowbar that would do murderous work, as well as his club: but though by means of all these weapons he might level the foremost of his enemies, he was certain to be overpowered by numbers. All these reflections swept through the man's brain in an instant,—quick as thought alone can travel. Then what was the desperate idea which had suggested itself? We shall now see.

Chiffin had sped furiously on during the space of about two minutes: and, as we have already stated, his pursuers were rapidly gaining upon him. He glanced back: the foremost were not fifteen yards distant. In another two minutes he would be in their hands! All in a moment he sprang upon the parapet—balanced himself there for another instant—and in the next made one tremendous spring forward, disappearing from the view of the officers. They stopped short literally appalled,—for the height was great, and if he fell on the towing-path beneath, he must either be killed on the spot or fearfully maimed. But a tremendous splash in the water far below made them aware that Chiffin had cleared the towing-path and had plunged into the canal. Some of the officers rushed to the parapet and looked over: some sped forward to seek a descent to the towing-path; while others as quickly retraced their way to hurry across the bridge and intercept the Cannibal's flight on the opposite side. The confusion and excitement were immense. Those who remained looking over the parapet, threw the light of their bull's-eyes down into the cutting through which the canal ran: but the rays reached not far enough to find reflection on the surface of the water—nor could the glances of the men penetrate through the depth of gloom into which they looked down. Gurgling and splashing noises were heard, evidently produced by the struggling of the Cannibal in the water: but in about a minute they ceased altogether.

It was more than two or three minutes before any of the officers succeeded in getting down upon the towing-paths on either side; and then it was too late. Nothing could be heard or seen of the Cannibal. A careful inspection of the bank, however, on the opposite side of the canal to that where he had plunged in, showed where he must have scrambled out, as that particular spot was all wet. In the same manner his progress was traced a little way along the path; and in this direction did the officers accordingly speed—but without success: he had fully accomplished his escape.

Three or four hours later, when the potboy and servant-woman at the boosing-ken rose to enter upon the duties of the day, they made the fearful discovery of the horrible murder which had been perpetrated. An alarm was quickly raised—the neighbourhood was aroused—the utmost excitement prevailed. The servants knew that Tony Wilkins had been asked to remain for the night at the house: his bed had not been slept in—he had disappeared—and there was consequently no doubt as to his guilt either as the sole perpetrator of the deed or as an accomplice. The police repaired in due course to the scene of the horrible tragedy; and it now became known that Chiffin was encountered and chased in the middle of the past night. It was not therefore difficult to imagine that he was one of the authors of the crime; and measures were accordingly taken with promptitude for the apprehension of the Cannibal and of Tony Wilkins.

CHAPTER CXIII.

THE TWO MURDERERS.

In the meantime Tony Wilkins had repaired to King's Cross, according to the directions of the elder ruffian. He lounged and loitered about for ten minutes, and then began to think it strange that Chiffin did not come. Another ten minutes elapsed: but still the Cannibal made not his appearance. Suspicions had been growing and strengthening in the mind of Tony Wilkins during these last ten minutes; and he came to the conclusion that the Cannibal meant to self-appropriate all the produce of the crime. Wherefore had he not made the division previous to their separation? and wherefore did he not keep his appointment now? Wilkins was almost distracted at the thought of having committed so hideous a deed and placing his neck in peril of a halter, without reaping one farthing's benefit. He had scarcely any money about his person; and it was absolutely necessary he should get away from London as soon as possible. What was he to do? The idea occurred to him that he had better proceed at once to that boosing-ken in Bethnal Green where he knew that Chiffin had purposed to take up his temporary quarters, he having left his lodging in Camden Town immediately after the attempted assassination of Madge Somers. For Wilkins thought that if anything had

transpired to prevent the Cannibal from joining him at King's Cross, and if he really meant to act fairly in dividing the booty, he would proceed to that public-house in Bethnal Green in the expectation of being joined there by his accomplice.

After a walk of nearly an hour and a half Wilkins reached the boosing-ken. It was now nearly four o'clock in the morning: the place was shut up—and Tony scarcely liked to disturb the inmates. So he walked about in the neighbourhood for another hour, taking good care to elude the notice of the policemen, who might question or watch him. His mind all this time was in a dreadfully disturbed state: he was filled with remorse for what he had done, because he had as yet reaped no benefit to create a feeling of reckless joy which might absorb that sentiment of compunction. He was harassed too with his suspicions of the Cannibal's perfidy.

At length he returned to the boosing-ken, and now ventured to knock at the door. In a few minutes it was opened by an ill-looking fellow who acted as potman, and who seemed savagely sullen at having been disturbed from his slumber. He knew Wilkins as a friend of Chiffin's; and as Chiffin was intimate with the landlord of the place, and also a good customer there, the potman did not dare openly to offend anybody connected with him. He therefore answered Tony's queries. The Cannibal was not in the house—he had not slept there that night—he had left at about eleven o'clock—and had not returned since: but a chamber was kept for his accommodation according to his order.

Tony Wilkins was embarrassed how to act. He knew that suspicion of the murder, when discovered, would fall upon himself; and he was therefore most anxious to get out of London: but if he fled at once, it would be throwing away his last chance of meeting the Cannibal and receiving his share of the spoil, supposing that his accomplice really meant to deal fairly by him. The potman seeing that he hesitated and that his looks were strangely wild and troubled, asked if anything was the matter?

"I must see Chiffin—and so I'll wait for him," replied Tony. "We have missed each other, and I hav'n't been in bed all night."

"Well it's no use keeping me standing at the door," said the potman sullenly; "and if a bluebottle happens to come into the street he'll think there's summut queer going on: so you'd better come in; and if you're tired, what's to perwent you from going up and having a stretch on the bed in Chiffin's room?"

"So I will," answered Tony. "And mind, if anybody comes to inquire arter me, I ain't wisible not to no one, except Chiffin his-self."

"All right," growled the potman, as he closed the front-door of the boosing-ken again. "I s'pose you and the Cannibal has been doing a bit of business together?"

"Yes—but nothink pertickler," responded Tony quickly and curtly. "Which is the way?"

"Come along," was the answer given by the man: and he forthwith conducted Wilkins up into an attic, where he left him.

Tony was at first inclined to throw himself down on the bed to rest: for he was thoroughly wearied and exhausted, as much by the excitement of his mind as by the many hours he had been wandering about. But he felt so uneasy and troubled that he could not lie down. He knew the domestics at the *Billy Goat* were early risers, and that by this time the murder must be discovered: every moment was therefore precious—and he ought already to be many miles away from London. It was no use for him to wait there unless confident that the Cannibal would make his appearance. But how could he know this? As he asked himself the question, the thought struck him that if Chiffin had left anything at this boosing-ken, it might be regarded as a proof that he really meant to return. So Tony began looking about the room. There was a cupboard, which was locked; and this he had a great mind to break open.

"It wouldn't be fastened," he thought to himself, "if it hadn't summut in it worth taking; and if so, I may as well help myself, no matter whether the contents is Chiffin's or belongs to the people of the house. I must be off soon; and I can't go with only a few shillings in my pocket."

Without any farther hesitation, Tony Wilkins drew forth his little crowbar and began to operate on the cupboard-door. In a very few moments it was opened; and he perceived a pair of pistols, two or three shirts, and a bunch of skeleton-keys, which he knew belonged to the Cannibal. He wondered that Chiffin should have taken the precaution to look up these things of such trifling value; and he instituted a more rigorous search in the cupboard. There was a heavy pair of boots lying at the bottom, and which he likewise knew to be Chiffin's. He took up one of them to see whether they were in a better condition than his own—in which case he would self-appropriate them—when he felt something inside. He drew it out: it was a brown paper parcel, tied round with string, and likewise secured with sealing-wax. The words, "*Powder and bullets*," were scrawled on the wrapper in Chiffin's own hand. Tony Wilkins proceeded to open the parcel,—when, to his mingled amazement and joy, he discovered that it contained an immense quantity of bank-notes, with perhaps about a hundred pounds in gold. The coins were so rolled up into different packets as to make the parcel feel, ere it was opened, as if it really did contain a quantity of pistol-bullets. All the murderer's remorse vanished in a moment: he had suddenly lighted upon a treasure! A hasty computation showed him that the booty amounted to at least six or seven hundred pounds; and he was almost wild with delight.

Securing the treasure about his person, and likewise self-appropriating the pair of pistols, Tony Wilkins descended from the chamber as gently as possible, and slipped out of the house, unnoticed by the potman, who was taking another nap on the mattress where he slept in the tap-room. But just as he emerged into the narrow street, or alley, he beheld Chiffin hurrying towards the place.

"I thought I should find you here," said the Cannibal, who seemed in a most wretched plight,—haggard and exhausted—his clothes soiled with mud and bearing the indications of a recent drenching—his whole appearance, indeed, most suspiciously strange. "Come in," he added gruffly: "we can't stand speaking in the street:—and he knocked peremptorily at the door, which Wilkins had closed behind him.

In a few moments the summons was answered by the potman: but at the very instant that Chiffin

crossed the threshold, Tony Wilkins rushed away—and turning the corner of the street, was at once out of sight.

"What the deuce does it mean?" exclaimed the Cannibal, sweeping his startled looks up and down the narrow alley in which the boosing-ken was situated: for he naturally thought that his accomplice had suddenly been terrified by the appearance of police-constables.

"And how come he out of the house?" said the potman. "I never heard him go down stairs?"

"What do you mean? where has he been?" demanded the Cannibal, turning round with such fierce abruptness upon the potman, that the latter started back in terror.

"Been? Why he come to wait for you——"

"But where has he been?" vociferated Chiffin, furious with mingled rage and apprehension.

"Been? Why, up in your room——"

"Perdition!" thundered forth the Cannibal; and felling the potman with one tremendous blow of his fist, he sprang up the stairs like a maniac.

The master of the boosing-ken, startled from his sleep at that tremendous rush of heavy steps up the staircase, issued forth from his room just as Chiffin had sprung past the door to gain the higher storey. And now, what cries of rage and bitter imprecations reached the ears of the astounded landlord, who dared not ascend to see what was the matter. But in a few moments Chiffin came thundering and storming down again; and then his loss was revealed, amidst a torrent of the most shocking oaths and diabolical threats. The landlord besought him to be tranquil, or his vociferations would alarm the neighbours: but it was some minutes before the Cannibal could recover the slightest degree of calm. Then he hastily threw off his own soiled and still damp garments, and put on a suit with which the landlord furnished him. This being done, he rushed away from the place, resolved to scour the whole neighbourhood in search of Tony Wilkins, even though at the risk of being recognised and captured by any policemen whom he might meet.

He had not however gone far, before he was struck by a sense of the imprudence of his conduct, as well as by the thought that Wilkins, having at least twenty minutes' start of him, was not likely to be overtaken in that maze of streets, lanes, and alleys. He stopped short, uncertain what course to pursue. Should he go back to the boosing-ken? Scarcely had he asked himself this question, when he recollected that he had left the produce of the past night's crime in the clothes he had put off: for such was his hurry that he had omitted to take the money and the jewels from the pockets thereof. He now cursed his own oversight as bitterly as he had ere now vented his imprecations against Tony Wilkins. He was penniless. He had not even his burglarious implements about him: the very tools that constituted his "stock-in-trade" were wanting. The morning, too, was advancing—the people were getting up and opening their shutters—it was now dangerous for him to be abroad. There was no alternative but to go back to the boosing-ken.

On reaching the alley where it was situated, he peeped cautiously round the corner; and the first object that met his view, was a policeman standing at the door of the public-house. The constable might only be waiting for a morning dram; or he might have a more important object in view. There might be other policemen, too, inside the premises. The murder in Agar Town might long ere this have been discovered—suspicion, after the adventure of the canal, would naturally fasten itself upon him—this public-house might be known to be one of his haunts—and hence the presence of the police. All those reflections swept like a hurricane through the mind of the Cannibal; and he turned abruptly away. The condition of that man's mind was now horrible in the extreme: it was a perfect hell of all the worst and deadliest passions that can possibly find a resting-place in the human breast. But the dominant one was a diabolic thirst for vengeance against Tony Wilkins.

He pursued his way through the narrowest and obscurest streets, in the direction of the eastern outskirt of the Bethnal Green district. The inhabitants of that poor and wretched quarter were now all entering upon the occupations and the toils of the new-born day. The milkman was making his round, dispensing "hapo'rthe" of his well-watered commodity at every door. Beggars were seen issuing forth from the dens where they had slept,—walking firmly and looking happily enough, till they entered upon the verge of superior neighbourhoods, when they gradually assumed a shuffling, shambling gait and the most lugubrious expression of countenance in order to pursue their calling. From some open windows the sounds of the weaver's shuttle might be heard; and at others, poor squalid-looking women were seen hanging out patched and ragged articles of clothing to dry. Mechanics and labourers were proceeding to the places where they worked, while others were going to seek for employment. Hideous objects, male and female, were creeping along to the public-house to take their morning dram: street-sweepers, with shouldered brooms, were on their way to the crossings that they claimed as little freeholds of their own in better neighbourhoods. The barber's shop was filled with customers; and bristly beards were disappearing before the keen edge of the razor. Costermongers, with their baskets and trucks, were setting out on the day's trading ventures, with as much speculative pre-occupation as if they were merchants proceeding to the City to deal with hundreds of thousands of pounds sterling. Here might be seen a little child of scarcely five years old staggering under the weight of a quartern loaf just fetched from the baker's: another returning from the chandler's at the corner, with the half-ounce of tea, the quarter of a pound of sugar, and the diminutive morsel of butter for the breakfast. Other children had already commenced the day's usual routine of playing in the gutter, and picking up such garbage as might serve to compensate for the scantiness of the meal whereof they had partaken in-doors.

The Cannibal pursued his way; and in a short time he reached Hackney Marshes. He wandered on, though sinking with fatigue and half-famished with hunger. He had no settled plan: he knew not what course to adopt. Far into the fields he went: he slaked his thirst at a brook—and at length threw himself under a hedge, where he fell into a sound sleep. When he awoke the sun's rays were pouring down, hot and almost scorching, upon his face; and he knew it must be nearly mid-day. He had therefore slept several hours. He rose up and

walked still farther into the country. Again he slaked his thirst at a rivulet: but his hunger was now ravenous. He beheld a cottage at a distance: and thither he bent his steps. The door stood open: a labourer and his wife, with three or four children, were seated at a table, partaking of their frugal repast. Chiffin approached the threshold, and asked for a piece of bread, saying that he was in great distress. He had on a decent suit of clothes, supplied by the landlord of the boosing-ken; and the first thought of the man and his wife was that he was some broken-down tradesman. They were therefore about to invite him to enter and partake of their meal: but when they looked a second time at his villanous hang-dog countenance, they felt convinced that he was an evil character; and the peasant, getting up from table, closed the door abruptly. Chiffin gave vent to a savage imprecation, and dragged himself away.

At a distance from that cottage he sat down again to reflect upon his position and the course he should pursue. That suspicion would fall upon himself in respect to the double murder in Agar Town, he had no doubt; and that there would be an active search for him, he was equally confident. So far as his apparel went, he was to a certain degree disguised by the plain but respectable suit he had on: but how could he prevent his countenance from betraying him? This was the question. Even if he had his whiskers shaved off and his hair cropped close, his features would still remain too remarkable not to identify him. Therefore, to re-enter London was under any circumstances impossible. As for writing to the landlord of the boosing-ken in Spitalfields, to ask that he would remit his money to any stated place,—this would be absurd: for that individual, in the supposition that Chiffin was by no means likely to return to his house—or that if he did, he would be completely in his power—was sure to self-appropriate whatsoever was found in the pockets of the garments left behind. Then what was he to do? A thought struck him. What if he were to travel into Lincolnshire and pay a visit to Saxondale Castle? If her ladyship were still there, well and good—she would supply him with funds: but if not, he could hide himself in the western wing of the building—the larder of the castle, stealthily visited by night, would supply him with food—and he might thus lead a comfortable life for some time, until he found the means and opportunity for getting out of England.

The Cannibal's resolve was accordingly taken; and he composed himself to sleep again under a hedge, so that he should be sufficiently refreshed to journey throughout the ensuing night. It was sunset when he resumed his walk: but he felt faint for want of food. Food he must have, by some means or another. Bending his steps in a northern direction, he entered on the high road with a determination of stopping the first solitary traveller he might chance to encounter, provided the appearance of the individual should promise a booty worth the risk. He walked slowly along—for he was weak and well nigh exhausted, notwithstanding his slumbers of the day: his hunger was no longer ravenous—it had subsided into faintness. The twilight had passed: but it was a beautiful clear night, in the month of September. Presently he heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs approaching from behind at a brisk trot. He had in his hand a good stout cudgel with which he had provided himself; and he grasped it in readiness to make an attack. The horseman soon overtook him; and the glance which Chiffin threw over his shoulder at the individual, decided him in a moment. Desperation and excitement nerved him with strength: as for courage, he naturally possessed it. The traveller had the appearance of a substantial farmer, and was a short, stout, strong-built man, somewhere about forty years of age. Chiffin sprang forward, his club in one hand, the other stretched out to seize the bridle of the horse: but the animal, frightened at the suddenness of the movement, swerved aside—and the next instant its rider rolled in the dust. It is more than probable that he would have been stunned by the fall: but the Cannibal, to make sure, dealt him a blow on the head which effectually deprived him of his senses, though not of life. Chiffin lost not an instant in turning out the contents of his pockets, which he found to consist of between two and three pounds in money, some papers, and a silver watch. Of all these things the Cannibal took possession; and for a few moments he deliberated whether he should self-appropriate the horse likewise: but he feared that it might lead to his detection—and he accordingly hastened away from the scene of his villanous exploit.

Speeding across the fields, he ran till he was quite exhausted, and was compelled to rest for a time. Then he continued his journey again—and soon reached a village, where he procured refreshments. Here however he made but a brief halt: for in the tap-room of the public-house where he partook of his meal, the conversation turned upon the dreadful murder which had been discovered that morning in a part of London called Agar Town. The names of Chiffin and Tony Wilkins were freely mentioned, and in rather an unpleasant way too for the listener. It even struck him that he was surveyed in a somewhat scrutinising manner by those present: and thus he was by no means sorry when, on quitting the public-house, he breathed the open air again.

CHAPTER CXIV.

MRS. BROUGHTON AND THE COUNTESS.

RETURN we once more to the palatial mansion of the Earl of Castlemaine at Kensington. It was the fourth day after the scene when the Countess fainted in her attempt to write a letter to her husband; and during this interval she had remained unconscious of all that was passing around her. When she recovered her intellectual faculties, she began to question Mrs. Broughton as to how long this relapse had lasted—whether the Earl had visited her as was his wont—and whether anything of importance had taken place? In reply to these queries she was informed that she had been three whole days in a dangerous condition again—that the Earl himself, pleading indisposition, had kept his own chamber—but that he had regularly sent to make inquiries relative to her ladyship's health. Mrs. Broughton added that nothing of importance had occurred,—thereby meaning that there had been no fresh intrusions on the part of the nocturnal visitor to the suite of chambers.

The Countess was much affected on hearing that her husband was unwell: but it soon struck her that this indisposition on his part was merely a pretence in order to avoid the necessity of visiting her own sick-room; and the tears trickled down her cheeks at the thought. After a few minutes' pause she once more expressed a wish to write to her husband: but Mrs. Broughton positively refused to give her the writing-desk—observing that she had incurred a severe rebuke from Dr. Ferney for having done so on the previous occasion.

It was about mid-day when this discourse took place between the Countess of Castlemaine and Mrs. Broughton. Her ladyship inquired the hour; and on being informed, she said, after a few minutes' reflection, "I can endure this state of mind no longer! Earnestly and strenuously would I have avoided the intervention of a third party: but it has now become necessary. If I am not permitted to write, I must speak——It is killing me to endure all this! But of whom should I make a confidant if not of you? whose assistance should I invoke if not your's, my good and faithful Broughton?"

"I beseech your ladyship to compose yourself," said the kind-hearted dependant. "There are more ways of exciting the feelings than by endeavouring to write a letter; and if you experience another relapse, it may prove fatal."

"I will compose myself for a few hours, Broughton," responded the Countess. "But promise me that if this evening—let us say between nine and ten o'clock—you find me sufficiently tranquillised, sufficiently strong also to endure whatsoever little fatigue may be attendant on unbosoming my soul to you,—you will listen—you will permit me to speak—and you will promise to befriend me?"

"Heaven knows, dear lady," responded the woman, with earnest sincerity, "if I could really befriend you, I should be only too happy. But, alas! ——"

"You fear," said the Countess, perceiving that Mrs. Broughton suddenly stopped short, "that mine is a case beyond the reach of friendly aid, and that I have been guilty of errors which naught can efface? You shall see!"—and most singular was the expression which settled upon the pale countenance of Lady Castlemaine—that same expression which had before so much bewildered the worthy Mrs. Broughton, and had set her reflecting whether it were possible, in the face of all circumstances, that the Countess could be innocent?

"Compose yourself, dear lady," she said: "and this evening, if you will, you shall command my services."

"You promise me?—and your promise has already tended to cheer my spirits. My mind is indeed more tranquil now. I feel as if I could enjoy a few hours of peaceful slumber."

"Oh, do!" cried Mrs. Broughton; "and you will awake refreshed."

The Countess of Castlemaine said not another word—but settled herself to sleep; and in a little while she was wrapped in slumber. Soon afterwards one of the younger damsels entered the sick-chamber with an intimation that the Earl had left his own apartment, and had descended to the drawing-room, where he desired Mrs. Broughton's immediate presence. She accordingly proceeded to obey the summons; and on entering the drawing-room, was at once struck by the Earl's altered appearance. He did indeed seem as if he had been very ill: his countenance was haggard and careworn—his eyes, so dark in hue and so bright in lustre, now appeared to burn with the superadded glow of fever. Mrs. Broughton had not seen him for three whole days; and it was therefore no wonder that his altered aspect should strike her so powerfully.

"Dr. Ferney, who was here just now," began the Earl, so soon as she stood in his presence, "tells me that her ladyship has regained her consciousness. Is it so?"

"It is, my lord, I am happy to say," replied Mrs. Broughton.

"And you have been conversing together, no doubt?" continued the nobleman. "I have not forgotten that on the last occasion when I spoke to you privately, you manifested a distaste—a very delicate and praiseworthy one, no doubt—against repeating what occurred between your mistress and yourself. But I hope that you intend to be a little less scrupulous now——Stop! don't interrupt me—I will tell you wherefore I make the remark. I had not seen Dr. Ferney for several days until this morning. He spoke of her ladyship's relapse and its cause: he mentioned something about her desire to pen a letter to me, and that it was while attempting to do so her strength failed her. Was this the case?"

"It was so, my lord," replied Mrs. Broughton, who certainly saw no harm in making this statement. "But at the same time I must request——"

"I know what you would request," interrupted the Earl: "that the interrogatory should cease here?—but it cannot! You must tell me what your mistress purposed to write to me: for I am certain that you know."

"My lord, as I am a living woman and have a soul to be saved," replied Mrs. Broughton, "I am unable to answer that question. Her ladyship did not tell me what she purposed to write."

"But will you pretend," he continued, almost sternly, "that you are not in her confidence? Mrs. Broughton, an accident made you acquainted with the circumstance of my dishonour. You might perhaps have suspected it before—you discovered it for a certainty *then!* Will you have me believe that you did not soon afterwards inform her ladyship of what had taken place?"

"No, my lord—I should scorn to do so," she exclaimed, indignantly; "and I should have been likewise sorry indeed to let her understand that you thought so ill of me as to expect that I would repeat conversations and give way to gossip or tittle-tattle. No, my lord—I would not do so!" and she was turning to quit the room.

"But one word, Mrs. Broughton—one word, I beseech you!" exclaimed the Earl, now totally unable to control or conceal the excitement which had seized upon him. "I am about to ask you something to which you *may* give me an answer. The servants——do they speak together?——you know what I mean—do not force me to put into words the odious, horrible thoughts which are uppermost in my mind."

"I believe, my lord," was Mrs. Broughton's guarded response, "that there is not a household in all London where the domestics generally are so

devoted to their master and mistress—or would be more grieved to——"

"This is no answer!" interrupted the Earl fiercely, as he sprang up from his seat. "Do they—do they *suspect* what you *know*?"—and his eyes appeared to burn like living coals as he fixed them upon Mrs. Broughton.

"Since your lordship requires me to be explicit," she rejoined, "I am bound to say that it would be impossible for the servants to avoid certain vague suspicions: but while they suspect, they wonder also, and are bewildered."

"Then *they*, Mrs. Broughton—and *you*," continued the Earl, "have never seen anything to justify those suspicions?"

"My lord, I will be questioned no more," she interrupted promptly and firmly; for though she might have said that the servants had never seen aught to justify their suspicions, she could not make a similar averment in respect to herself after the mysterious intrusions in the suite of chambers and the letter which she had picked up; while, on the other hand, she scorned to tell an untruth in respect to the matter.

"No, you cannot depart yet!" exclaimed the Earl, springing after her as she turned abruptly to quit the room; and clutching her by the arm, he held it as if his grasp were of iron. "You shall speak—you shall tell me all I seek to know," he continued in a thick hoarse voice. "I must learn the extent to which I am dishonoured—I must ascertain whether it be worth my while to keep the hideous secret any longer, or whether I shall expose it to the world at once."

"No, my lord—for heaven's sake do nothing rashly!" cried Mrs. Broughton, now painfully affrighted. "It would be the death of her ladyship!"

"Her death!" echoed the Earl bitterly, as he with strange abruptness abandoned his hold on Mrs. Broughton's arm—and even tossed it away from him as if in disdainful indignation at the sort of appeal she had made to his feelings on Lady Castlemaine's behalf. "Her death!—and what matter? Wherefore should she live? To haunt me like a spectre—the personified hideousness of my dishonour—supposing that we continue to dwell beneath the same roof and if I keep the secret from the world?—or else to live, openly branded—publicly disgraced—thrust out from the home which she has made miserable and degraded? Were she wise, and if she had courage as well as shame, she would fly from this world—she would abandon it, even though she laid hands upon herself! Ah, and she would appeal to me for mercy perhaps? *That* I have already shown her—too much, too much! But for forgiveness? No—never, never! She stretched out her arms to me—she adjured me by my name—and I fled from her presence when she awoke, as I would from a reptile that was uncoiling itself! And she would write to me?——Yes, let her write—for perhaps she would confess who was the author of her shame and of my dishonour: and *that* is a secret I long to learn! Oh, why is she so beautiful?—so beautiful and yet so false! the hypocrisy of a serpent in the form of an angel! My God, why is she so lovely——why?"

The Earl of Castlemaine had walked to and fro in the apartment with agitated steps while thus speaking: for he was in a state of terrible excitement. Mrs. Broughton had remained rivetted to the spot,—her presence of mind and her fortitude abandoning her: for she feared lest the nobleman should go mad, and in his ravings in the presence of others give forth revelations that never could be recalled. She was affected too by the wild and mournful accents in which the last sentence of his speech was delivered. She had never seen him in such a mood before—unless it were when entering the chamber unperceived, she had caught the words in which he had apostrophised his sleeping wife. But now there was such a depth of feeling in what he had just said, that she pitied him from the very bottom of her soul. Nor could she help remembering how great was the forbearance he had shown from the very first moment that he discovered his wife's condition on the memorable night of the Duke of Harcourt's ball; and she felt that there must be much generosity and much magnanimity in the soul of this man, beneath that proud and inscrutable exterior! Indeed, she was now struck by the conviction that it was not altogether to save his own name from dishonour that he had shown so much forbearance—but that it must at least in some degree be connected with a once powerful affection entertained for the guilty Priscilla.

Suddenly stopping short in his agitated walk, the Earl of Castlemaine waved his hand for Mrs. Broughton to retire; and she quitted the room accordingly,—her mind filled with melancholy reflections on all that had taken place—but yet not without a faint ray of hope stealing through, to the effect that the revelation she was to hear from the lips of her mistress might in some sense, more or less, give a different complexion to the affair. Yet again and again did she ask herself how in the presence of all damnatory circumstances, Lady Castlemaine could possibly be innocent?

Mrs. Broughton had no undue share of curiosity, as the reader has already seen: but she certainly awaited with much anxious suspense the hour at which the confidential interview with her mistress was to take place. But not to keep the reader unnecessarily delayed, let us suppose that nine o'clock had come—that Lady Castlemaine felt so much invigorated and refreshed that Mrs. Broughton did not deem it imprudent to allow her to converse at length—that they were alone together in the sick-room, with the wax-lights burning, and the curtains carefully closed over the windows. Mrs. Broughton was seated by the side of the couch; and as she bent her looks upon her mistress, she observed an air of mingled decision and confidence on her features, which made the heart of the worthy woman bound with the hope that it might still be possible to clear up all incriminating circumstances. Her ladyship, without raising her head from the pillow, turned her countenance towards Mrs. Broughton, and commenced her narrative in the following terms:—

"I must go back to those times when I was a young creature of between fifteen and sixteen, dwelling with an uncle and aunt: for, as you are already aware, my parents died when I was in my infancy. I had no brothers nor sisters: the family title had become extinct at my father's death; and the estate was sold to satisfy the demands of the creditors. I was portionless, and dependent upon that uncle and aunt. But they supplied, as much

as relatives can, the place of the parents I had lost: they were all kindness to me; and as they had no children of their own, I was to them as a daughter. They themselves were not rich, though in comfortable circumstances: but the chief source of their income was a Government pension conferred on account of diplomatic services, and which would of course die with its recipient. My parents had perished too early for me to deplore their loss as deeply as I should otherwise have done had I known them better; and the goodness of my kind relations prevented me from experiencing the intense severity of such a loss. Thus I was happy,—as happy as a gay and artless girl of between fifteen and sixteen might well be, who knew nothing of the world and of its cares. I had not been introduced into society: or, in fashionable parlance, I had not as yet 'come out,' when I first formed the acquaintance of Lord Castlemaine. He was then about twenty-eight years of age. I need not tell you that he was handsome, because he is handsome now—and you also knew him *then*—or at least, shortly afterwards, at the time of our marriage. I was then staying with my relatives in the country: his lordship was on a visit to a nobleman who dwelt in the neighbourhood: he had some years previously, when he himself was a youth, formed the acquaintance of my uncle—and it was now renewed. Through courtesy he was first invited to the house: the love that he conceived for me led him to repeat his visits. My heart was engaged to him before I comprehended what love was, or wherefore I felt so happy in his presence and pondered so much in solitude on all that he had said when we were together. Thus some months passed away. He lingered in that neighbourhood: he became a daily visitor at the house. At length, when I was sixteen, my aunt questioned me as to the feeling I entertained towards Lord Castlemaine. The question, though delicately and guardedly put, was in itself a revelation: the truth, hitherto utterly unsuspected, flashed upon my comprehension. I understood it all—I loved Lord Castlemaine! Blushing and weeping, I threw myself in the arms of my aunt, with the vague idea that I was guilty of some crime in thus having unconsciously learnt to love. She embraced me tenderly, and breathed in my ears the almost overpowering assurance that his lordship loved me likewise. She went on to observe that on account of my tender age, he had spoken in the first instance to herself; but that if—as he had ventured to hope—his affections were reciprocated, he would plead his suit in person. The Earl thus became my intended husband: I was affianced to him: and although my relatives would have urged the postponement of our union for at least a year, his lordship's persuasion over-ruled their wishes, and it was agreed that in four months I should accompany him to the altar."

The Countess paused, and seemed to be somewhat faint. Mrs. Broughton entreated her not to continue if she felt unequal to the task: but her ladyship assured the worthy woman that she had physical strength and mental fortitude adequate for the occasion, and would prefer going on. She accordingly resumed in the following manner:—

"It is particularly of those four months which elapsed from the date of our engagement to that of our marriage, that I have next to speak. The Earl left the mansion of his noble friend in the neighbourhood, and took up his quarters at a residence near our own, so that he might be with me as much as possible. Words have no power to convey the extent of his love. I did not then comprehend it all myself: I have comprehended it since. But at the time I was too young, too inexperienced, too ignorant of the human heart and its passions, to understand the depth, the intensity, and the power of that love of his. On my side I loved fondly and devotedly—but yet with a certain serenity, which though in itself delicious, displayed itself not in sudden gushes of feeling. When the heart's love is full of confidence—when there appears no possibility that any circumstance can arise to mar its progress or frustrate its hopes—and when it is entertained by one who knows too little of the world to dream of accidents, casualties, and disasters,—the sentiment naturally glides as serenely as the unruffled streamlet. But it was altogether different with Stephen—Lord Castlemaine, I mean. *His* love appeared to be a source of pain as well as of pleasure to him: it racked him with doubts while it filled him with joy: it made him mistrustful of the very happiness of which it was the source. He regarded it as a dream which the slightest incident would dissipate—a bright vision too beautiful to last. It was a rose with thorns. Under its influence his soul appeared to be an Æolian harp, which even to the warmest and most fragrant zephyr sends forth plaintive and wailing sounds as well as others melodiously cheerful. How often and often was he wont to ask me if I were confident that I loved him—if I had examined well my own heart—if I felt assured that I could never change? I was sometimes hurt as well as afflicted by these reiterated questionings, which I could not help fancying argued distrust on his part of the sincerity of my affection. But he would assure me in such glowing and impassioned terms that he knew beforehand what my answers would be, and was so convinced of their sincerity, that the momentarily inflicted wound was healed in my heart and my sorrow vanished. Then he would tell me that he only put those questions because it was so sweet to receive the assurances they elicited; and yet in the very next breath he would make me tell him solemnly and sacredly that I had never loved before——I, a young girl only fifteen and a half when I first learnt to love *him!* In these latter questions there was something that more than hurt me—that seemed even to insult me: but when he beheld the tears trickle down my cheeks, he would snatch me in his arms and kiss them rapturously away. Rapturously?—yes, and vehemently too—for there was much wild impulsiveness in that love of his. If I were not always talking to him of our love, he would reproach me with being indifferent—he would even accuse me of being cool and distant—he would express his fears that I did not really love him, but only fancied that I did. Conceive all this to me, a young creature of sixteen whose entire hope of happiness was centred in that man! I was hurt and afflicted—wounded and insulted by those reproaches so unmerited, those accusations so undeserved: and then he would entreat my pardon in the most vehement manner—he would level the bitterest reproaches against himself—he

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would anathematise his own folly—he would make himself miserable by declaring that though we loved so fondly, we were not made for each other. Nor was this all. Sometimes, when we had parted in the most affectionate manner in the evening, he would send me a note the first thing in the morning, to the effect that it struck him I was cool and distant when we separated—he expressed his conviction I had something on my mind—that I looked dull and unhappy—that I had perhaps a secret which I kept from him—that perchance I regretted having promised him my hand: and thus would he conjure up an infinite variety of circumstances which had not the slightest foundation for their existence. He would entreat a few lines in reply, either to assure him of my continued love, or to let him know the worst at once. And I would write back according to the dictates of my heart; and he would speed into my presence, imploring forgiveness for having tortured himself and me. Then he would enjoin me to cheer up—to look happy and gay—to smile—to laugh: and when I could not, or did so only by a forced effort which was but too plainly visible, he would again accuse me of being dull and unhappy—he would make a reproach of the very affliction which he himself had caused me. In this manner did the four months pass away; and it was with the utmost difficulty I could conceal from my uncle and aunt the effects of these frequent interruptions to the even flow of my happiness. Nevertheless, as a general rule, I was *not* unhappy—for when alone, I reflected that all these peculiarities of conduct and varieties of temper on the part of Stephen, were only so many evidences of a profound and deathless love, which ought to make my heart grateful even amidst the very pangs they caused it to experience."

Again the Countess paused with a renewed feeling of exhaustion, and not to collect her thoughts: for the tide of these flowed rapidly in upon her brain, and she had but to cast her mind upon the current in order to give them adequate expression. The sensation of fatigue quickly passed away in the excitement of her discourse; and she continued in the following terms:—

"You perceive, my dear Broughton, that this is an analysis of a human heart upon which I have entered—the heart of my husband!—and you will comprehend presently wherefore I thus dwell upon such minute details, and why the dissection of that heart is so carefully made. I have already hinted that there was something wild and impulsive in the Earl's love—I may add that it was romantic and feverish. Oftentimes would he burst forth into the most impassioned delineations of that love of his: he would compare it to the burning brilliancy of the noon-day sun, and would tell me that mine resembled only the reflection which the earth caught thereof. At other times he would seize me forcibly by the wrist—grasp it till he hurt me—and with a strange wildness in his look, would declare that it was a fearful thing to love as he loved; for that he was giving to a human creature the adoration which properly belonged only to the Creator. Thus did he frighten me with the vehemence of his manner and the singularity of his words: but in his milder and more tender moods, he was so endearing and affectionate that he amply repaid me for whatever transient anxieties and afflictions he thus caused me to experience. But one evening, within three or four days of the one fixed for our bridal, a scene took place which I must specially note. There was a large garden attached to the house where I dwelt with my relatives: and on that particular evening I had rambled with the Earl until a somewhat later hour than usual. It was the month of August; and the weather was warm and delicious. For some time, on the occasion of this ramble, the discourse was unruffled by a single word on his part to cause me pain. Never indeed had his manner been more endearing: never was his language more soft—more tender. I really thought that he himself felt that he had sometimes shown too much vehemence towards me—that he regretted it—and that he was endeavouring to make all possible amends. In the silent gratitude of my heart I thanked him; I regarded it as another proof of his love. But I did not express those thanks in words: to do so would have been to revive unpleasant reminiscences, and even appear like a reproach for his faults. The dusk was closing in; and I at length said that, feeling somewhat tired, I would re-enter the house. I do not know whether he were offended that the proposal to go in-doors should emanate from me—or whether some entirely different thought, flashing to his mind, suddenly altered his mood: but so it was—and catching me by the wrist, he beat upon me looks that appeared to burn with living fire as he said, 'Remember, Priscilla, you possess my love! It is a love of romantic wildness: beware how you ever do aught to change this feeling: because from a love so wild would spring the wildest vengeance!'—I was alarmed: I even shrank from him. It was natural enough; for the horrifying fear took possession of me that he was suddenly going mad and would do me a mischief. He became almost enraged: he conjured me to tell him, by everything I deemed sacred, that I really loved him. My lips tremulously framed the answer he sought: and he appeared pacified. We entered the house: he remained for about another hour, his manner having resumed all its affectionate tenderness—his discourse its melting suavity. When he took his leave, I thought that he went away completely happy. But when I ascended to my own chamber, a sudden idea struck me as if with a violent blow; and dispensing with the services of my maid, I sat down to ponder upon it. Was it possible that Stephen thought I loved him only for his title and his wealth?—or rather that I was affecting a love which my soul experienced not? I was shocked at the bare idea that such hideous selfishness could be imputed to me. But was he so ungenerous as to entertain such a suspicion? Alas, I feared so: or else wherefore those constantly reiterated questions relative to my love? wherefore those repeated adjurations that I would search well my own heart and analyse my feelings ere I again gave him the assurance that I did love? I was portionless—my prospects on the part of my relatives were but small, as I have already stated—and therefore it might be deemed natural that I should do my best to acquire a social position, with name and rank. But, Oh! as I wept bitter burning tears while thus giving way to my reflections, I said to myself that I would sooner break off the match at once, notwithstanding the sincere truthfulness of my love, than suffer it to

progress and have that love suspected. I therefore made up my mind to speak very seriously to the Earl of Castlemaine on the following day, and beseech him to let everything end at once between us, unless in his own heart he entertained the conviction that my love was purely and disinterestedly devoted to him. You may well suppose, my dear Broughton, that while engaged in such reflections as these, I had no inclination to sleep. I had not even begun to lay aside my apparel: I had thrown myself on an ottoman at the foot of the bed—and there had I remained giving way to those painful thoughts. Nevertheless the time had passed quickly away: it was half-an-hour after midnight. The weather was sultry—the night was oppressive—and the excitement of my feelings added to the natural heat. My cheeks burnt as if in a fever—my temples throbbed—I felt as if I were about to faint. I opened one of the casements: my chamber was at the back of the house, and looked upon the garden: there was consequently no impropriety in thus going to the window to let the air, if there were a breath stirring, fan my countenance. The night was beautifully clear—so bright indeed that the smallest print might have been read; and a gentle breeze did spring up at the time—so that it blew refreshingly on my throbbing brows and feverish cheeks. I lingered at that open window, gazing up into the moon-lit heavens, and sighing for an influence to my soul of that serenity which appeared to prevail above! When about to withdraw from the casement, my looks fell upon the garden; and I started in mingled astonishment and terror, on beholding the form of a man motionless in the midst of the grass-plat which was almost immediately under my window. My first impression was that it must be one of the men-servants—my second that it was a robber: but my third, which instantaneously became a conviction, was that the Earl of Castlemaine himself was the individual stationed there. Yes: there could be no doubt of it! I recognised his form—his attitude—his very garments. He was standing with his arms folded across his chest—his looks bent down, as if in the deepest meditation. And he remained so motionless too, that it seemed as if he had been turned into a statue. Good heavens! what could this mean? A thousand varied and conflicting thoughts swept through my mind. Was he jealous, and had he come to watch my movements? was his object of even a darker character, and more criminally insulting to the purity of my own character? or in the romantic wildness of his love, had he come to woo me down to a renewal of our evening ramble in the garden? or, more tenderly romantic still, had he come only to be near the dwelling which harboured the object of his adoration? These were a few of the hurried and excited questions that I put to myself. You may wonder, Mrs. Broughton, that such reflections should have suggested themselves to a young maiden of but four months over sixteen: but during those four months my eyes had been opened to many pages of the book of experience—to many readings of the human heart. Love is a great teacher—but more so when it displays itself in such wayward moods, wild humours, and impassioned phases as did that of the Earl of Castlemaine."

The Countess again paused: but this time it was only for a few moments; and she quickly resumed her narrative, which deepened in interest as it progressed.

"I was rivetted to the casement for some minutes, not knowing what to think or how to act. To my increased astonishment, the Earl did not once look up at the window; but there he stood—motionless—with his arms folded over his chest, and his eyes bent down, so that I did not obtain a glimpse of his countenance. I grew frightened: a superstitious terror came over me. Could it be possible that I beheld the spiritual image of one who physically and in earthly shape was elsewhere—perhaps slumbering in his couch at his own residence? This apprehension was speedily augmented into absolute torture, so that I lost as it were the fear of encountering an apparition in the anxiety to ascertain if such it really were. In one sense therefore I became suddenly nerved with a strange fortitude. There the figure remained—still motionless—still with arms folded—still with looks cast down. I hesitated no longer: my feelings were terrible—it was absolutely necessary that I should go and see what this was and what it meant—it was a mystery too appalling not to be cleared up at once. I did descend: the house was quiet—no one heard me opening the back door—and I stepped forth into the garden. My first feeling was one of a cold shudder as I flung my looks in the direction of the grass-plat, expecting to behold that figure still there: but it was gone. Then my eyes were swept wildly all around: but no living object, nor the semblance of one, met my view. I was now shockingly frightened; and as I hastily re-ascended the stairs to my chamber, I shuddered and recoiled under the apprehension that the cold hand of death might suddenly be laid upon my bare shoulder. I put off my apparel and went to bed: but it was not till long after the sun had risen that sleep visited my eyes. Then I beheld the whole incident enacted over again in a dream—the figure on the grass-plat, motionless as a statue, with folded arms, and face bent downward! When I awoke I felt cold as ice; and collecting my thoughts, I endeavoured to ascertain whether the whole had been a dream and that I had not really gone to the window at all, nor seen the figure, nor descended into the garden. I knew not what to think. On the one hand there appeared to be the conviction that the incident was real, and that it had been repeated in a dream: but then, on the other hand, was my own endeavour to believe that it was *all* a dream, and to persuade myself that it was so. I resolved to keep the circumstance locked up in my own bosom, and not to speak of it unless the Earl himself should mention it. He came, as usual, soon after breakfast: he was happy, cheerful, and loving: he brought me handsome presents, which he had purposely caused to be sent down from London; and he talked joyously of the proximity of the wedding-day as he imprinted kisses on my cheeks. Then he spoke of our love: he volunteered his conviction that mine was as sincere and earnest though not so impassioned as his own;—and throughout that day not a single unpleasant word ruffled the harmony of our minds. How, therefore, could I carry into effect my resolution of the previous evening—to beg that everything might be broken off unless he were thoroughly convinced of the disinterested and unselfish quality of my love? No—

I could not: nor did I wish to do so: there appeared to be no necessity now for such a serious step. But not a syllable fell from his lips relative to the incident of the past night; and therefore I concluded that it must have been all a dream: for I could not bring myself to fancy that I had seen an apparition—and if it were he in person, how could he thus avoid making any allusion to the topic?—for he must have known that I had opened my window and seen him there. Assuredly, I thought to myself, it was naught but a dream!"

The Countess paused and remained silent for some minutes. Mrs. Broughton made no remark: she was deeply anxious to hear the remainder of the narrative which had already acquired so profound an interest.

"The Earl took his leave of me that evening in a cheerful and affectionate manner," resumed the Countess, — "whispering to me as he went away that we should soon be united no more to part. I ascended to my chamber: but when I reached it a superstitious terror, vague and undefined, seized upon me; and I instantaneously felt that if I were to seek my couch at once, I should vainly endeavour to close my eyes—for that an irresistible fascination would attract me to the window at about the same hour as on the preceding night, to send my shuddering looks forth and see if the same object presented itself on the grass-plat. So I dismissed the maid at once, and sat down to give way to my reflections. With respect however to the impossibility of sleeping I was wrong; for gradually did slumber steal upon me—and though I slept not soundly, yet was I plunged into a state of dreamy repose, in which the faculty of accurate perception and reasoning was lost. I was awakened up by hearing my name pronounced. '*Priscilla!*'—the summons came from the garden—not loud, but yet clear and unmistakable, in the Earl's voice. '*Priscilla!*'—the summons was repeated. I started up wildly. '*Priscilla!*'—a third time did my own name, thus sent up from the garden, reach my ears. Then it must be *he*, I thought to myself: and my superstitious terrors vanished: but as I passed the mirror on my way to the casement, I caught sight of my countenance by aid of the wax-candles burning on the toilet-table; and I saw that it was pale as death. And no wonder—for I had at first been fearfully alarmed. I drew aside the curtains—I opened the window—I looked forth—and there was the Earl, or at least his image, standing on the grass-plat below. His face was upturned to the casement: the silver flood of moonlight poured upon it, and in that argentine reflection it seemed white and ghastly as that of a corpse! I shuddered to the uttermost confines of my being: methought I gazed upon a ghost. He beckoned me to come down to him. I obeyed mechanically—with an awful horror in my soul, and yet without the power to remain where I was, to cry out, to summon assistance, or to go elsewhere than down the staircase leading towards the back entrance to the house. But when I opened the door and gazed forth, no one was upon the grass-plat. Then, all in an instant I found myself nerved with a degree of fortitude as sudden as it was wonderful: I hastened round the garden—I looked everywhere—but no human being, nor any image of one, met my view. I went back to my chamber, bewildered—not knowing what to think. I fell upon my knees, and prayed long and fervently to heaven, imploring that if this were meant as a preternatural warning for any wise purpose of the Omnipotent, some farther sign might be vouchsafed to convince me of its reality—some sign that would leave no doubt behind, but would be unquestionably convincing. I rose from my knees, almost expecting that something of the kind would take place. I went again to the window, and looked forth: but I beheld nothing more to startle or dismay me. I sought my couch; and strange as it may seem, it is not the less a fact that sleep almost immediately visited my eyes. When I awoke in the morning, I did not remember having dreamt of anything."

"And did you not, dear lady, on that occasion," asked Mrs. Broughton, perceiving that the Countess paused again, "speak to his lordship on the mysterious subject?"

"No—I did not," responded the Countess of Castlemaine; "and I will tell you wherefore. He came at the usual hour, and seemed so cheerful and so happy that I could not find it in my heart to mention the circumstance. For I reasoned to myself that if it were *he* in person whom I had seen upon the grass-plat, he must have wandered forth from his own residence in a very perturbed state of mind—and that as he did not now make the slightest allusion to the incident, it was natural to suppose he sought to banish it from his recollection. But if on the other hand it was really an unearthly and preternatural image of himself—what in some countries would be called a *fetch*—I dared not strike sadness into his soul by acquainting him with the terrific warning thus given. In my own heart, however, I was exceedingly unhappy—though I struggled with an almost incredible energy to veil my sorrow and appear in good spirits. He did not notice on this occasion that there was an under-current of melancholy feeling beneath the smiles that I put on and the gaiety that I endeavoured to throw into my language: nor throughout that day did he exhibit any of those peculiarities of mood or eccentricities of temper which I have been endeavouring to describe. When night came I shuddered to find myself once more ascending to my chamber: I even resolved to go to bed at once, and not look forth from the casement. But this determination I had not strength of mind sufficient to put into force: an irresistible power—something more awfully solemn than mere curiosity—compelled me to sit up, and at midnight to glance from the window. But I beheld nothing to alarm or bewilder me: the grass-plat was unoccupied. I had the courage to sit for nearly an hour at the casement to watch if aught would appear: and it was a considerable relief to my feelings to retire to rest without having been again terrified or dismayed by the unaccountable presence of my intended husband or his preternatural counterpart. Then, again I asked myself, 'Were the incidents of the two preceding nights naught but dreams?'—I would have given worlds to be able to believe them so: but I could not—no, I could not! I will not however dwell at any unnecessary length upon my narrative. The following day passed happily enough: the ensuing night was undisturbed; and on the morn that followed I became Countess of Castlemaine. The

honeymoon was passed at this mansion; and it was about two months after the marriage that you, Broughton, entered my service."

Her ladyship paused for a few moments, and then resumed the narration of her wild and singular story:—

"You have already heard enough to make you comprehend that my husband's temper had its wayward moods—I may even be pardoned if I denominate them infirmities. I loved him so tenderly—so devotedly—that I was fully prepared to adapt myself to his humours and accommodate myself to his ways. I saw that he loved me with an excess of ardour not often shown by even the most adoring of men; and for such an amount of love I could well afford to endure the eccentricities into which my husband might be betrayed by the very intenseness of that passion. Time wore on—and I found that my experiences before marriage in respect to the Earl's temper, were perpetuated afterwards; and the two great objects of my care were to avoid giving him the slightest cause of offence—and to prevent the world, or even our own household, from becoming aware of the scenes which frequently disturbed our domestic bliss. But I must now enter into details with regard to them. I cannot exactly say that his lordship was jealous: but there were times when he was haunted by the fear that the sincerity of his own love was not fully reciprocated by me. If he beheld me in low spirits he would at once take it upon himself to assert that he knew I regretted having linked my destiny to his own; and even when I solemnly and sacredly assured him that my heart clung to him with all the power of woman's devotion, he seemed not to give me credit for truthfulness. Frequently, when in the midst of a calm and tranquil conversation, he would suddenly start up from his seat, fix his looks upon me, and vehemently proclaim that he was guilty of a crime in loving me with such an intensity of passion; for that I had become the idol of his worship, and that he was an idolator! The assurance of such an illimitable love would have been joyous instead of saddening: but it was accompanied with such strange vehemence of manner—and I may even add, with looks so terrible—that I was both frightened and afflicted. And then, because I turned pale or instinctively shrank back, he would taunt me with coldness—with want of affection—even with harbouring a sentiment of aversion towards him. At other times he would calmly and deliberately assure me that if he thought I did not really love him, he would fly from the world and bury himself in some solitude, to brood over his woes in secret. On such occasions as these I scarcely knew how to act: for if I entreated him to put away such dreadful ideas from his mind, he would angrily charge me with an attempt to tutor himself into the same indifference which he accused me of feeling;—and if, fearful of provoking words, I held my peace, he would then at once discover in that silence a proof of the very indifference of which I was accused. In short, he conjured up a thousand phantoms to haunt himself wherewith: the love that he bore for me was a source of affliction instead of happiness to his own heart. Heaven knows how carefully I studied to discipline my conduct—to regulate my very words and looks—so as to avoid giving him pain. Fearful that he might become downright jealous, I never went into society save when accompanied by his lordship: I never danced—I never would give the slightest encouragement to that homage which a young lady in my position might naturally expect from the other sex. But even in thus maintaining so rigid a guard over my conduct, I found that I was often wrong in my husband's estimation. He would reproach me for being dull and unhappy—for being dispirited and despondent—for moping and pining—and for being unlike all other women. What was I to do? If I abandoned myself to the giddy whirl of fashionable frivolity—if I accepted flatteries and encouraged adulation—I foresaw that still more potent impulses would be given to the Earl's eccentricities of temper: but on the other hand, the extreme steadiness of my conduct was made a reproach! Nevertheless, every motive of prudence as well as my own natural inclination suggested a perseverance in the latter course: and I did persevere. About eighteen months after my marriage, as you will recollect, my uncle and aunt were both carried off by a malignant fever; and I was stricken with sorrow. For a few weeks the Earl appeared to experience the most delicate consideration for my feelings: but at length he began to regard my continued despondency as an ill-compliment to himself—and I was told that there was no earthly grief so great but that it ought to be calmed by the presence of a fond and loving husband. Now, my dear Broughton, have I succeeded after all this mass of verbiage in making you comprehend the intricacies and peculiarities of Lord Castlemaine's heart?"

"Yes, my dear lady," responded the faithful dependant, "you have indeed lifted a veil from the Earl's character. I understand him fully now! The love which he experienced for you was so impassioned and enthusiastic as to be absolutely selfish—and it rendered him a tyrant. He fancied that you ought not to cast a look, harbour an idea, or even respire a breath that had not some reference to himself:—to him you were to be all in all—to identify yourself with his feelings—to dream, to think, to look, to speak only beneath the dominant influence of love. You were to be *all* love—to make your wedded life one unceasing honeymoon! And it was natural—indeed, it was inevitable—that a man of such a disposition should torture himself and you with a thousand phantom fears—a thousand ridiculous suspicions. It was to be a constant study on both your parts to testify the love thus mutually felt: it was not to be a love to flow on in an even course like the unruffled stream,—but to gush with continuous excitement—and the greater its impetuosity, the better! And yet, my lady, the world suspected not that such was your lord's disposition: the household suspected it not either. On the contrary, the Earl of Castlemaine has ever passed for a nobleman of a temperament coldly reserved—may I venture to add, haughtily frigid?"

"Yes," replied the Countess, "that is doubtless his natural character in all things save with respect to the affection which he conceived for me. And when the power of this love so mightily stirred up the very depths of his soul, that outward composure on his part was still worn before the world as a

mask to conceal the perturbed state of his mind within. His pride—in respect to which he is most keenly sensitive—enabled him to sustain this outward composure, and to guard himself from ever being betrayed into those same paroxysms to which he has been excited when alone with me. Now, do not think, Broughton, that I am saying all this in disparagement of my husband. No—heaven forbid! I have loved him devotedly—I have never ceased to love him—I love him now——yes, at this moment as much as ever! But why am I telling you all these things? In the first place, it is because I had resolved to make you my confidante, in order to prepare you for a service which I shall presently seek at your hands; and in the second place it is to account for that separation of chambers—that partial alienation indeed—which took place between us about four years back. The Earl, as you have by this time understood, conjured up a thousand imaginary evils wherewith to torture both himself and me: but all this mechanism for racking us both, turned upon one pivot—namely, the idea that his love was not fully reciprocated. Well, to abridge my narrative as much as possible, I must inform you that he at length declared he had come to the conclusion that we were not fitted for each other—that we were never intended for one another—that it was a great fault on the part of each to link our destinies at the altar—and that as he saw he was making me miserable, he had resolved to give me in future as little of his society as possible. I was thunderstruck when he one day deliberately made me these announcements. Because I did not immediately fling myself into his arms, nor throw myself at his feet, and in vehement language proclaim the contrary of all he had asserted,—he took my conduct as another proof of indifference: whereas the real truth is that I was too deeply smitten with dismay to be mistress of myself. He abruptly left the room where this scene took place: and on subsequently repairing to my own chamber, overwhelmed with *grief*, I found a letter upon the toilet-table, announcing his future intentions. Give me my desk, Broughton—and you shall read it."

The letter was accordingly produced; and its contents ran in the following manner:—

"September 16th, 1840.

"It is not in anger that I write, my dearest Priscilla—but in sorrow. I must repeat what I said just now: we are not fitted for each other. I love you so much that perhaps my very love makes me a tyrant towards you. It may be so: but in that case I am the more to be pitied, because mine is an affection which must be incessantly gratified by a thousand little evidences of fondness—and therefore indifference kills me. I may exact too much: but I am the sufferer when experiencing disappointment. However the case may be, my mind is made up. We will henceforth see each other as little as possible: we will occupy different suites of apartments: but before the world our department shall be such as to defy calumny and give no scope for scandal. When accident throws us alone together, the word *love* must never again pass our lips. I charge you to obey me in this—I charge you not to seek by remonstrance, either written or spoken, to deter me from my resolution! If you do, that moment will I fly *away* from your presence altogether—and you shall never hear of me again. Understand me well therefore, Priscilla: *the consequences will be terrible if you disobey me!* We shall meet presently at the dinner table: let it be with the frank familiarity which subsists between husband and wife—and nothing more. Do not even cast a look upon me, nor steal one at me, which may convey a reproach an appeal, or a remonstrance. I am decided—and it is more for your sake than mine that I have come to this determination. I have no right to make you unhappy and torture you continuously: but if we dwell together as heretofore, I cannot possibly alter my behaviour towards you. It is only by a separation as great as circumstances will permit—by a mutual alienation as complete as we can render it—that a barrier may be raised up to protect you against the torturing influences which have hitherto been shed upon you. Again therefore do I conjure—command—entreat—and implore that henceforth we reside beneath the same roof on the terms that I have laid down.

"Your husband,
"CASTLEMAINE."

Mrs. Broughton could offer no comment upon this singular epistle: she dared not. It was evidently the emanation of a mind in a singularly morbid state. It constituted a hideous cruelty towards a wife who was accused of no crime—not even charged with the slightest act of levity: but on the other hand, the Earl could scarcely be held responsible for the deed, inasmuch as it was not perpetrated in wilful wickedness—it was the act of one who, sane in all other respects, was a monomaniac with regard to the love which his heart cherished.

"How could I behave," continued the Countess of Castlemaine, "in the face of a letter such as that? The agonizing thought seized upon me that my unfortunate husband's intellect was impaired on one particular point—and that if I thwarted his will, those *terrible consequences* to which he had so vaguely yet fearfully alluded, might ensue. Oh! what would I have given to speed to his apartment and fling myself at his feet? Such indeed was my first impulse: but I conquered it. I shuddered at the idea of driving him into complete and irreparable frenzy. I therefore bent to an imperious necessity,—deriving however some little solace from the reflection that in a very short time he of his own accord would adopt a conciliatory course. Four years have elapsed since then—and you know, Broughton, how we have lived together. But no—you do *not* know it all—you do *not* know that my husband still cherishes for me the same illimitable love as at first——"

Here the Countess stopped short suddenly, and her cheeks were suffused with blushes: she was all in a moment overwhelmed with confusion, while the tears were trickling down her cheeks. And—stranger inconsistency still—there was a partial smile upon her lips. Mrs. Broughton gazed upon her in astonishment. Bewildered as she had all along been in respect to the mysteries which evidently hung around the conduct of the Countess, she was now, if possible, more bewildered still. Was her ladyship innocent, that she could thus smile as she expressed the conviction of her husband's unaltered and still illimitable love? or were not those blushes and that confusion the evidences of conscious guilt? But those tears—they did not seem tears wrung forth by the stings of conscience, nor by the sense of shame: they appeared to flow over those blushing cheeks like a warm Spring-shower upon the damask leaves of the rose.

"And in respect, dear lady," Mrs. Broughton said, at length breaking silence, "to those mysterious incidents at your uncle's house, a few nights before your marriage—did you never clear them

up? did you never breathe a word to his lordship——"

"No—never, never!" ejaculated the Countess vehemently. "Never!"—then, after a long pause, she slowly added, "But the time is now come!"

Again did the Countess stop short; and it struck Mrs. Broughton that while her ladyship had something on the tip of her tongue to reveal, she nevertheless liked not to give it utterance. And that this conjecture was right on the dependant's part, was speedily proven by the observations which her mistress went on to make.

"No—I cannot finish my narrative now," she said murmuringly: "I am afraid that I have already spoken too much—the excitement has been great! But you will soon know all. And now listen attentively, Broughton—and render me the service which I am about to seek at your hands. You promise me that you will—do you not?"

"Beyond all doubt, my lady," was the answer, —"if it be consistent——"

"Yes—you will find that it is nothing which you may not do," interrupted the Countess. "Indeed you have already done it."

Mrs. Broughton looked astonished.

"Did you not tell me the other day," inquired the Countess, "when you spoke of those intrusions —you know what I mean—that you watched in the hope of catching the intruder? Well then, all the service I require at your hands is that you will do the same to-night—and to-morrow night, if it be necessary—and every night until you succeed in the object. Ask me no questions—force me not to say any more at present—I am exhausted—I shall experience a relapse. But yet one word more—— Let your measures be so well taken that if the intruder once again enters these apartments, he shall not escape till you have spoken with him."

"And what am I to say, my lady?" inquired the astonished Mrs. Broughton.

"Whatsoever circumstances may suggest," rejoined the Countess of Castlemaine.

CHAPTER CXV.

THE INTRUDER.

It was eleven o'clock at night; and her ladyship, though much fatigued by the long discourse she had held with her dependant, was unable to compose herself to sleep. Nevertheless, she lay with her eyes closed, and in perfect silence. Mrs. Broughton was seated near the table, reflecting profoundly upon all that her mistress had told her, but wondering why the narrative had been left incomplete, and that nothing was said to clear up the mysterious circumstances which had immediately preceded the marriage of the Countess,—nothing moreover in the form of a confession of frailty nor a proclamation of innocence,—nothing, in a word, to account for the condition of approaching maternity in which her ladyship found herself. But wherefore was such reserve maintained on all these points? It was true that the Countess had alleged fatigue and exhaustion as the motive for stopping short: but Mrs. Broughton felt convinced it was not the true one, and that her ladyship was not so thoroughly wearied as to have been unable to say a few words more. However, Mrs. Broughton had received the assurance that she would soon know everything; and it was not so much through a curiosity acutely piqued, as for the sake of a lady whom she sincerely loved, and for that of a nobleman whom she had learnt to pity, that she anxiously longed for an elucidation of all these mysteries,—being not without the hope that it might be for the best instead of for the worst.

The time-piece in the boudoir had proclaimed the hour of eleven, when Mrs. Broughton rose to take her measures for carrying out the task assigned to her by the Countess, and which indeed was but a repetition of the course she had already adopted of her own accord. Rising gently from her seat, she approached the couch: her ladyship opened her eyes for a moment—gave her a look expressive of gratitude—and then closing them again, settled the expression of her countenance into that of a calm repose. The faithful attendant thereupon issued forth from the chamber, closing the door behind her. She had ordered the nurse not to come to take her turn of watching until between one and two in the morning; and thus she had a considerable interval before her wherein to wait for the presence of the intruder if he should take it into his head to come. Of this however Mrs. Broughton considered there was little probability, inasmuch as several nights had now elapsed without seeing him return; and she fancied that after the loss of the letter, he would be in no hurry to repeat his visits. But all these things she had not represented to the Countess —whose bidding, on the contrary, she had promised to do: and therefore was it that she thus entered upon the task.

The boudoir, the parlour, and the ante-room were all three enveloped in total darkness: for the curtains were completely drawn over the windows— there were no lights in these three apartments—nor yet any fires in the grates. Mrs. Broughton fancied she could not do better than station herself in the ante-room on the present occasion; so that should the intruder revisit the place, she might at once secure the door and thus make him completely a prisoner until she should choose to emancipate him again. She felt her way to that door—she assured herself that the key was in the lock—and she then took a seat in its immediate vicinity.

We will not again pause at any considerable length to analyse her reflections while she thus remained stationed there: but we will content ourselves with observing that the thought which was uppermost in her mind was in the form of a query which she kept putting to herself, but for which she could find no reasonable solution. It was this: —"Wherefore has her ladyship enjoined me this task? why is she so anxious to put me in communication with one who must doubtless be a stranger to me? and why should she seem confident that he will make his appearance either to-night or very shortly?"

An hour passed away—the time-piece in the boudoir proclaimed midnight—and Mrs. Broughton was still at her post,—wide awake,—faithfully keeping watch,—and listening with suspended breath to catch the slightest sound that might seem to herald the approach of a visitor. The metallic cadence of the last stroke of the clock was still vibrating

through the apartments, when her ear distinctly caught the sound of a foot-fall in the corridor leading to the ante-room. She rose up gently from her seat—she stood in readiness to secure the door—and again she listened. Yes—she was not deceived: footsteps were approaching slowly, and as if the individual were advancing in a manner that was rather deliberate than actually cautious,—for though the steps seemed measured, yet the tread might have been lighter. Those steps ceased at the door: then she heard the handle turn—the door opened slowly—and some one passed into the room. The individual, whoever he was, closed the door and advanced farther into the apartment. Then Mrs. Broughton lost not a moment in turning the key in the lock, taking it out, and securing it about her person. This being done, she listened in the expectation that the intruder, becoming alarmed, would say or do something. But no such thing! He spoke not a word; and she heard his footsteps continue to advance, as if he were either totally unconscious or else reckless of the presence of another person in that dark room. Then she grew frightened: she knew not what to think: there was something terribly mysterious in the entire proceeding. A cold perspiration broke out upon her forehead: she felt the blood curdling in her veins. But this panic on her part was only transient: naturally a strong-minded woman, she quickly recovered her self-possession; and she followed in the footsteps of the intruder, for the purpose of clutching him by the arm and compelling him to speak. But then the thought flashed to her mind, that if being so deeply absorbed in the mystic purpose for which he had come, he was too suddenly startled into the consciousness of detection, he might deal her a blow—he might use violence to escape—he might do her a mischief. So she resolved to wait a few moments and ascertain what course he was about to adopt. He was safely a prisoner there; and she could address him at any instant she chose,—while any attempt he might make to fly would be frustrated by the door being locked.

He passed on through the parlour, she following him. He entered the boudoir; and she was now close upon his track. He was making his way direct to the bed-chamber of her mistress,—when arming herself with all her courage, she stretched forth her hand at random, and clutching him by his garments, said in a quick firm voice, "No! whoever you are, you enter not there!"

The individual seemed suddenly shaken by a strong convulsive spasm: but he made no effort to escape from Mrs. Broughton's grasp. For the space of a dozen moments a profound silence followed the words she had spoken: then a sudden but low and half stifled ejaculation of dismay burst from the lips of the intruder;—and stretching forth his arms, he caught violently hold of Mrs. Broughton, exclaiming, "Who are you? where am I?"

Heavens! it was the voice of the Earl of Castlemaine himself!

"Oh, my lord! my lord!" cried Mrs. Broughton, a sudden thrill of exultant joy passing through her entire frame as she was smitten with the conviction of her lady's innocence: "pardon me for the way I spoke—pardon *me* for my rudeness in laying hands upon you——"

"Good God! where am I?" exclaimed the Earl, more wildly than before: "where am I? what does it all mean?"

"One moment, my lord!" quickly responded Mrs. Broughton: and disengaging herself from his grasp, she opened the door leading into the bed-chamber.

The light of the candles flooded forth upon the countenance of the Earl of Castlemaine; and for an instant it was terrible and ghastly to behold: for every lineament expressed a terror half wild, half stupifying, as if the unhappy nobleman had just been startled out of his sleep. And it was so. Mrs. Broughton had comprehended it all in an instant:—the Earl of Castlemaine was a somnambulist!

"My lord," she hastened to say, taking him by the hand and compelling him to sit down on a chair in the boudoir, but near the open door of the bed-chamber, "compose yourself—tranquillise your feelings, I conjure you! Oh, my lord! you ought to be happy—for—for——you are not dishonoured! Do you not understand me?"

These last words she had uttered in a whispering voice; and Lord Castlemaine,—who, for the previous few moments had been gazing in a sort of wild vacancy and appalled stupefaction around him,—was suddenly galvanized by the thrilling conviction that it sent in to his very soul. He started up into the full vitality and keen perception of fullest wakefulness: his countenance became animated—joy, wonder, and exultation expanded thereon—and then wildly crying, "Yes, she is innocent! she is innocent!" he rushed into the bed-chamber.

"Pardon, my angel—pardon!" he exclaimed, as he threw himself upon his knees by the side of the couch; and taking the hand which his wife extended to him, he pressed it to his lips.

Mrs. Broughton discreetly closed the door of that chamber,—she herself not crossing the threshold; but sitting down in the darkness of the boudoir, she wept plenteously for very joy. Her mistress was innocent—and she was happy, this good woman! —Oh, supremely happy!

Several minutes elapsed before she could so far collect her thoughts and compose her feelings as to remember that she had locked the outer door and had secured the key in her pocket. Ah! there was no need now to retain the intruder captive and extort from him a promise that he would not revisit the place: for never was intruder more welcome, or never more certain to come back again, after the scene of reconciliation which she knew full well was at that instant taking place in the bed-chamber adjoining. The sounds of impassioned language reached her ears,—words of entreaty from the lips of the Earl that his Priscilla would forgive him all the past,—words, too, of glowing promise that thenceforth his constant study should be to render her really happy! Mrs. Broughton, on thus obtaining the certainty that the reconciliation *was* complete, issued from the boudoir—unlocked the ante-room door—and proceeded to her own chamber to enjoy the luxury of her reflections until she might think it proper to return to the apartments of her mistress.

It might be supposed that, after the long illness which the Countess of Castlemaine had experienced, this scene with her husband would prove too much for her, and that she would faint away beneath its

almost overpowering influence. But it was not so: the excitement of thrilling bliss following upon acute suspense, appeared to revive her lost strength and resuscitate the energies which indisposition had paralyzed. Oh! to faint away from the sense of renewed happiness which she now enjoyed, would be as it were to die out of paradise;—and Lady Castlemaine experienced too vivid a delight—too thrilling an ecstacy — not to feel her entire form glowing as it were with the vital warmth of a new existence. It was fresh life that was infused into her: it was a new state of being into which she found herself transported. We shall not make the slightest attempt to reproduce here the precise terms in which full explanations presently took place between the husband and wife: but we shall in a narrative form furnish the reader with the sense and tenour thereof.

Enough has been gleaned from the history which Lady Castlemaine breathed in the ears of Mrs. Broughton, to shew that the Earl was a man of peculiar disposition. There were certain defects in his temper, and a morbidness of the mind, which were purely constitutional,—not to be attributed to any other cause, nor emanating from any untoward circumstances of his earlier life. For indeed, his existence had been marked by no misfortunes, save those which may be termed of his own creating, or which arose from the infirmities of his character. Whenever enjoying happiness, he was always suspicious of it; and thus the drop of gall had been invariably mingled in the cup of sweets. When he first learnt to love Priscilla, he tortured himself with the idea that as he was twelve years older than she, it was scarcely possible she loved him for himself alone. Yet if he deliberated calmly and rationally on the subject, he knew that it was so. His own good sense—his power to estimate the human character—and the thousand and one little evidences which tend to prove a disinterested attachment

all spoke in favour of Priscilla: yet, as if he could not help flying in the face of all evidence, and doubting as it were his very convictions, did he thus torture himself with imaginary apprehensions. This produced a restlessness of spirit that rendered him a somnambulist; and hence those wanderings at night-time when he appeared beneath Priscilla's window at her uncle's house, and when his statue-like attitude on the grass-plat filled her with such a bewildering terror. After their marriage he continued, as the reader has learnt from Lady Castlemaine's lips, to torture himself in the same manner as before; and thus his feelings were worked up by the morbid action of his imagination to such a pitch, that he actually came to the conclusion they were unfitted for each other, and that they ought to separate so far as circumstances would allow. Not for a moment did he ever suspect her purity or mistrust her honour; and he knew that his own temper was to a certain extent the cause of her unhappiness. From the letter which he wrote to his wife, the reader has seen he was thus far sensible of his own unfortunate disposition as to comprehend that the very magnitude of his love rendered him a tyrant. It was therefore as much out of consideration for Priscilla as in obedience to the promptings of his own diseased mind and uneasy spirit, that he insisted on that separation of chambers. His object was that they should keep as much apart as possible, so that she might be removed from the influence of his unfortunate temper, and he himself might be debarred from the circumstances and occasions which developed its infirmities.

But in the hours of slumber his soul was wide awake—his mind slept not; and thus in the wanderings of somnambulism was he led towards the object of his love,—that love so deep, so wild, so eccentric! It was an irresistible attraction exercising its power over his mind when the mystic spell of sleep was upon the body,—and his wife comprehended that it was so. Often and often did she think of revealing to him, when they met in the day-time, how he sought her at night: but she shrank, with a feeling of delicacy and shame which cannot fail to be understood, from making such a confession. She often thought seriously, too, of writing in a letter what she dared not avow with the lips; and on many and many an occasion did she take pen and paper to commence that strange mysterious revelation: but she knew not how to find language even for the very commencement. And it was not only that sense of delicacy and shame which thus sealed her lips, and paralyzed the hand when it took up the pen; but it was also the fear of causing her husband a shock which might be fatal to his intellects: for she saw full well that he entertained not the slightest suspicion that he was a somnambulist. Thus did time wear on; and the secret remained inviolable in her bosom.

We must now observe that in the solitude of his own chamber—in the day-time, when wide awake, and often of an evening ere retiring to his couch—Lord Castlemaine would draw forth from his desk some letters that he had received from Priscilla during the time of his courtship; and it was to him a melancholy pleasure to read and re-peruse them over and over again. Perhaps he was wont to do the same when under the influence of that mystic power which made him a somnambulist: but certain it is that the letter which Mrs. Broughton picked up one night in the sitting-room, and which she had since kept, was written by Priscilla to the Earl himself at the time of his wooing. If the reader will refer to it again, he will find that it must have been in reply to some note penned by the Earl in one of his excited humours of doubt and uncertainty as to Priscilla's love. From the fact that when in a state of somnambulism he had taken that letter with him on the night that it fell into Mrs. Broughton's hands, it may easily be supposed that he had actually been reading it in his sleep; and that, believing as he did at the time that his wife had dishonoured him, he was prompted to take it to her chamber, to reproach her for having proved faithless to the energetic assurances of love contained therein.

It is well known to those who are acquainted with psychological phenomena, that somnambulists often display an extraordinary amount of wariness and caution in order to escape observation. In this respect they frequently give evidence of that same species of cunning which inspires lunatics; and to this circumstance may be attributed the fact that for so long a period the somnambulistic propensities of the Earl of Castlemaine had continued unknown, and even unsuspected, to every individual of the household, his wife alone excepted. But it appeared that it was only at intervals he was thus seized with fits of somnambulism; and when once the spell was upon him he would continue his sleep-walkings for several nights running. These fits generally took him after his mind had experienced any unusual degree of excitement; and then they would be followed by an interval of many weeks—perhaps even months—before they were renewed. The greater the excitement which acted as the motive cause, the more frequently were the sleep-walkings repeated, and the longer the period of the fit's duration. Thus was it that Lady Castlemaine, who knew his habit so well, felt assured when she set Mrs. Broughton on the watch, that her husband would repeat his visit to her chamber.

When a few days back she had suddenly wakened up and found him standing by her bedside—and when, as she stretched out her arms to him, he fled so precipitately,—she was about to reveal that long-maintained secret the avowal of which had now become necessary to clear up her own honour;—and when she would have afterwards penned a few lines to him, it was that she had made up her mind to commit to paper that revelation which he had afforded her not the opportunity of breathing from her lips. But, as the reader has seen, her strength failed her; and the attempt was followed by a relapse. On coming back to consciousness on the fourth day, she determined to make a confidante of her faithful Broughton,—not merely for the purpose of using the woman's aid to render the Earl acquainted with what she was denied every other opportunity of revealing to him—but also that Mrs. Broughton herself might serve as a witness of the actual occurrence of his somnambulistic visit, and thus under any circumstances be enabled to testify to the honour of her mistress.

It was now, therefore, for the first time that Lord Castlemaine awoke—to speak literally—to the fact that he was a somnambulist; and the reader may

imagine far better than we can describe, how great was the joy which sprang up in his soul when the husband discovered that he was not dishonoured in his wife. The explanations which took place between them occupied a considerable time; and when Mrs. Broughton, after the lapse of a couple of hours, returned to the bed-chamber, she received the warmest thanks from both the Earl and her mistress. It was after his lordship had withdrawn to his own suite of rooms, and when the Countess was repeating what had passed between herself and her husband, that the worthy dependant produced the letter she had picked up, and which at the time had seemed irresistibly to corroborate her idea of her ladyship's frailty. This letter was restored to the Earl in the morning, with an account of how it had fallen into Mrs. Broughton's possession.

When Dr. Ferney made his appearance in the forenoon, the Earl of Castlemaine had a long and very serious conversation with the talented physician. His lordship made him acquainted with everything; and the good-hearted Ferney was overjoyed to learn that the Countess was still in every way worthy of her husband's love.

"Your lordship asks me," he said, "to what treatment I will subject you in order to cure you of this habit of somnambulism? Physically, I can suggest nothing—because you are abstemious and temperate, regular in your meals, and not addicted to late hours. But mentally I can offer my counsel; and to a certain extent the cure will be in your lordship's own hands. You now find that you possess a wife who dearly loves you. You have tortured yourself with misgivings in respect to an affection the truth and sincerity of which every circumstance has so fully proved. Even when you were merely her suitor and it was not too late for her to retreat from her promise to become your bride, she endured your whims and put up with your humours——Pardon me for speaking thus plainly; but it is requisite. And she did more than all *that*, inasmuch as from the kindest and most delicate feelings she forbore from the slightest allusion to those circumstances which had so much alarmed her, and the least mention of which would have at once shocked you with the revelation that you were a somnambulist. Four years ago you, of your own accord, separated from her ladyship as much as you could or dared without creating an open scandal. This was one of the most flagrant outrages and most monstrous pieces of injustice that a husband could be guilty of towards a wife. If she had dishonoured you, my lord, you could have done but little beyond:—you could scarcely have punished her more severely; and yet she endured it! Yes—for four years has she endured it; and when under the influence of somnambulism, the instinct of the senses led you to her couch, she abandoned herself to your embraces rather than shock you by startling you into wakefulness, and thus menacing your reason. Now, my lord, I have spoken candidly and frankly: I may have spoken severely too—but it was needful. I have put your own conduct in its proper colours; and you can appreciate to what advantage that of your wife shines by the contrast. But why have I thus spoken? To make you aware of your duty—and through the medium of your duty, to work out your mental cure."

"You need not tell me, my dear Dr. Ferney," interrupted the Earl, alike affected and humiliated, "to take back my wife to my bosom—to surround her with attentions—to lavish all possible kindness upon her: you need not tell me this—because it is the course I intend to adopt. She knows it. Last night, on my knees, did I beseech her forgiveness; and this morning have I renewed that prayer for pardon, accompanied by a solemn promise to make her every possible atonement for the remainder of my life."

"And if you fulfil these pledges, my lord," replied Dr. Ferney, "you will cease to be a somnambulist: but you must exert all your moral power to control the infirmities of your temper and mind. By studying to restrain them in the first instance, you will soon succeed in subjecting them to your dominant will; and ultimately they will die away altogether, leaving your mind in a wholesome state and your imagination healthful. Remember that your wife is but a mortal like yourself: you can now no longer have any doubt of the purity and sincerity of her love—but do not exact from her the necessity of constantly showing it. Study her disposition as she has ever studied your's. There will be mutual forbearance—mutual allowances made; and you will be happy. Surely a man of your intellect——"

"Say no more, Dr. Ferney!" exclaimed the Earl, grasping the physician's hand and pressing it with the enthusiasm of gratitude: "I understand my duties—and I will perform them. Henceforth my only study shall be my dear wife's happiness. Hitherto I have rendered her wretched enough: it shall be different for the future. When she has recovered, Dr. Ferney, you must not cease your visits on that account: you must come to us as a friend, that you may be satisfied your excellent counsel has not been thrown away upon me. You shall witness our felicity; and perhaps this extraordinary episode of domestic life which has thus come to your knowledge, will not be the least memorable of your manifold experiences."

"Ah!" said the physician, shaking his head solemnly, while a deep gloom settled upon his features,—"my experiences, Lord Castlemaine, have indeed been strange—too strange!"

The reader has no difficulty in comprehending that he alluded to all that had come to his knowledge at different times in respect to Lady Saxondale. The Earl of Castlemaine gazed upon him in surprise: for he had never before seen such a cloud gather on the physician's features, nor heard allusions of such mysterious significancy come from his lips. Ferney started up, fearing that in a moment of unconquerable emotion he had said too much; and grasping the Earl's hand, he exclaimed, "Think no more, my lord, of what you have heard. It is my secret!"—and then he added, more slowly and solemnly, "Your lordship perceives that your household is not the only one which harbours its mysteries."

The Earl of Castlemaine was not naturally endowed with curiosity; and he was moreover too much occupied with the circumstances that had so recently transpired beneath his own roof to pay aught beyond a passing attention to the physician's strangeness of looks and words: he accordingly pressed him not for an explanation. Dr. Ferney, hurrying from the room, proceeded to visit his

patient, whom he found so happy in mind that her health was improving hour by hour—minute by minute. The circumstances just referred to, had naturally produced their excitement; but it appeared not to be prejudicial to her ladyship: on the contrary, it seemed, as already stated, to inspire her with new life.

And so it was. At the expiration of a week she was enabled to sit up for several hours in an easy chair: at the end of another week she was strong enough to quit her own suite of apartments and repair to the drawing-room. Need we say that the Earl of Castlemaine kept his word, and proved most kind—most affectionate? or that he preserved the completest control over his temper? Indeed, his cure in this respect appeared to have been thoroughly effected,—as if he only required the strongest and most convincing proofs of his wife's undivided and disinterested love to render him a happy man. His spirits rose: he experienced a gaiety which for years he had not known—a buoyancy of heart that rendered him another being. Thus time wore on: the health of Lady Castlemaine was completely restored—the husband and wife ceased to occupy separate suites of apartments—and the servants of the household were unfeignedly rejoiced to witness a reconciliation which not merely established the felicity of their noble master and mistress on a sure foundation, but which set at rest any suspicions that might have existed with regard to her ladyship's honour.

CHAPTER CXVI.

THE LADY AT THE BALL.

It will be remembered that Lord Petersfield was appointed to undertake, on behalf of the Government, a special mission to Vienna,—and that his ward, Lord Saxondale, was induced by many reasons to accompany him. The mysterious murder of his mistress in Lincolnshire—his dismissal as the suitor of Lady Florina Staunton—his quarrel with Lord Harold—the coldness with which he was regarded by the other young noblemen and gentlemen of his acquaintance—and the satiety wherewith he was clogged in respect to the dissipated pleasures and debauched pursuits of London-life, had all combined to induce Edmund to take that step. He had longed for change of scene; and he knew that the post of attaché to an Ambassador Extraordinary would serve as the passport into the highest and very best society in the Austrian capital. The object of Lord Petersfield's mission was attained with greater promptitude than this nobleman had at first anticipated; and after a residence of about two months in Vienna, the embassy set out on its return to England.

It was in the middle of the month of October that Lord and Lady Petersfield, accompanied by Edmund, and attended by the other persons of their suite, arrived in Paris. Taking up their quarters at one of the most fashionable hotels, they purposed to remain in the French capital for about a week, previously to continuing their journey homeward. Indeed, Lord Petersfield had received private instructions to tarry for this brief space in Paris, in order to confer on certain political matters with the English Ambassador at the French Court; and Edmund who had visited this gay metropolis before, and liked it well, was by no means sorry to have an opportunity of mingling again in its pleasures.

We will not pause to relate how he accompanied Lord and Lady Petersfield to the palace of the Tuileries and was received by the King and Queen of the French—nor how he was included in the invitations to the soirées at the British Ambassador's mansion: but we will proceed to describe a circumstance which led to results of no mean importance to himself.

A grand subscription ball took place at the Odeon Theatre, on behalf of some charity connected with British residents abroad; and all the *elite* of the English aristocracy and gentry, at that time resident in Paris, were present on the occasion. Lord and Lady Petersfield, together with Edmund and some other gentlemen of their suite, repaired to this ball. The pit of the theatre had been boarded over to a level with the stage, so as to constitute a uniform surface of flooring for the dancers: at least a thousand persons, male and female, with every variety of splendid toilet, were assembled there: the orchestra was grand—the theatre was flooded with light—dancing was maintained with great spirit—and the spectacle was alike superb and exhilarating.

During a pause between the quadrilles—and while Lord Saxondale, having conducted his last partner to her seat, was lounging about alone, gazing upon the most beautiful of the fair sex with that half listless, half impudent stare which was partially affected and partially characteristic of the young man—he observed a lady enter, whose appearance he had not before noticed, and who indeed had evidently only just arrived. Her beauty was of that dazzling description which could not fail to strike every beholder, and which made an instantaneous impression upon Edmund Saxondale. She was tall, and most symmetrically shaped,—her figure combining the richness of a Hebe with the gracefulness of a Sylph. Her toilet was elegant, and tastefully adapted to her peculiar style of beauty. Her hair was of that auburn hue which shines bright as gold where the light falls upon it, but seems like dark velvet where the shade remains. It flowed in tresses and ringlets upon shoulders of dazzling whiteness,—one or two stray curls resting upon a bosom of voluptuous fulness. Her eyes were large and of a delicious blue,—not the dark blue of the violet, nor the azure of the heavens,—but of the intermediate hue. They were soft and languishing, and had an expression of sensuousness when the lids were allowed to droop slightly. The forehead was not high—but it was of alabaster fairness: indeed, nothing could exceed the transparent purity and clearness of this lady's complexion. The tint of the rose-bud was upon her cheeks, softening off till imperceptibly blending with the lily fairness of the skin generally. Her nose was slightly, but very slightly, aquiline: the mouth was small—the upper lip curved like Cupid's bow—the lower one fuller, but neither coarse nor pouting. The chin was softly rounded, and completed the oval of a face which would have been of faultless beauty if the forehead were slightly more elevated. Even as it was, it would have been a monstrous fastidiousness of

hypercriticism to cavil at that countenance as a whole, so far as its physical loveliness was concerned: but in respect to its expression, it was—as already hinted—somewhat voluptuous, and appealing as much to the sense as to the sentiment.

A single white camelia adorned the hair of glossy glory and rich luxuriance: two rows of pearls encircled the neck: but not fairer than that neck were those pearls, nor whiter than the teeth which embellished the lady's luxurious mouth. The costliest lace trimmed the short sleeves, and set off to advantage the plump and well-modelled arms of snowy whiteness. From beneath the long skirt of her dress, as she entered the spacious theatre, the well-shaped feet peeped forth; and a glimpse of the rounded ankles might be caught;—while the elegance of her gait and of all her movements denoted that sweeping length of limb which the fancy could depict as completing this ravishing portraiture.

Such was the lady who made her appearance in that brilliant assemblage at a somewhat late hour—indeed, long after the gaieties of the night had commenced. She came alone: no companion, either male or female, escorted her. Her age was about four-and-twenty; and thus, if she were a married woman, expecting to meet friends at the ball whom she might immediately join, there would be but little to remark in the circumstance that she came by herself—unless indeed it would strike any one as singular that a creature of such surpassing loveliness should have found no one in the form of relative or intimate friend to conduct her thither. Edmund Saxondale was so smitten with her appearance, that the moment she crossed the threshold and entered within the sphere of that assemblage whereof she suddenly seemed to become the brightest star, eclipsing all the rest,—he drew near to feast his eyes upon her charms. He noticed that for a moment she appeared to hesitate—that she even stopped short and threw a rapid glance of anxiety around: but this timidity, if such it were, was so transient that as she continued to advance, Edmund thought it might have been mere imagination on his part. At all events the lady immediately recovered her self-possession; and an air of dignity blending with that of elegance and grace which already invested her, she advanced towards a row of chairs in which several ladies were seated, but amongst which there were two or three unoccupied. In one of these vacant chairs the lady sat down,—at the same time inclining her head towards some of the ladies nearest to her, and with whom she thus appeared to be acquainted. They however, without acknowledging her salutation, stared at her in evident amazement; and two or three of them, who were nearest, rising suddenly from their seats, crossed over to the opposite side of the place. This example was promptly followed by the remainder of the ladies in whose vicinage the resplendent new-comer had placed herself; and she was thus in a few minutes left isolated and completely abandoned. The colour forsook her cheeks for a moment—she became deadly pale: but the next instant, appearing to summon all her fortitude to her aid, she flung a look of sovereign contempt across the theatre towards those who had left her thus alone;—and leaning back, she played with her fan with an air of the utmost unconcern.

Edmund Saxondale had observed all these little incidents which we have just related; and he was naturally astonished. He looked around, and perceived that the stranger-lady was the object of universal notice throughout the immense arena. Every eye was directed towards her; and the looks thus concentrated in that one brilliant focus, seemed to express a common feeling of intense surprise. He himself grew more and more bewildered: he could not comprehend what it all meant—for the life of him he could not understand it. That the lady was shunned, was but too evident: but for what reason? Would she have intruded there if she had foreseen what her reception would be? or was it a bold experiment on her part to ascertain how she *would* be received? Were the ladies all jealous of her transcending beauty? and was not this beauty a passport to the compassion of those of the other sex who were present? Such were the questions which Edmund rapidly put to himself: but the last one was answered by the circumstance that no gentleman accosted that lady.

The music struck up again—dancing recommenced—and in the renewed excitement thereof, the lady appeared to be forgotten. Lord Saxondale did not dance this time; and he looked about for some acquaintance to whom he might put an inquiry relative to the object of his curiosity. It however happened that the few individuals who were personally known to him, were all engaged in the quadrilles which had just commenced; and he could not accost them while thus occupied in the dance. He bethought himself of Lord Petersfield, whom he beheld at a distance, conversing with his wonted gravity in the midst of a knot of elderly personages. Hastening to approach his guardian, Edmund caught him by the arm so abruptly that the diplomatist bent upon him a look which had all the sternness of a severe rebuke.

"Just one moment!" said the young nobleman, literally dragging the old one aside with him. "I want you to tell me something——"

"Edmund——Lord Saxondale," said Petersfield, stopping short and looking awfully mysterious and solemn; "I do not understand this—I am at a loss to account for it. Your conduct is so extraordinary—catching me by the arm, as if——as if——I really know not how to find words to convey my sense——"

"My dear Lord Petersfield," interrupted Edmund petulantly, "I want you to tell me something. Who is that lady? do you know her?"

"Really the question is so sudden—so unexpected," answered the wary diplomatist, ever afraid of being caught in some trap or tumbling into some insidious pitfall: "you must excuse me, Edmund—but——"

"But who *is* that lady, my lord? do you happen to know her?" demanded Saxondale impatiently.

"Which lady?" asked Lord Petersfield. "Let me be convinced that I rightly understand whom you mean. Take time to point her out: for I should not like to have you speak in a hurry, more than myself to give a precipitate answer."

"That lady yonder—seated alone there, in the middle of that row of chairs, agitating her fan——"

"Are you sure that it *is* a fan? Don't be too positive, Edmund: appearances are often deceitfu'——"

"Do, my lord, tell me, if you know!" interrupted

Saxondale, with increased petulance. "That lady with the magnificent auburn hair——"

"You cannot guarantee that it is her own," observed Petersfield, shaking his head with solemn mystery.

"But you see her? Who is she?"

"Really, Edmund, this question is so home-thrust, that I—I feel myself justified in hesitating even before I answer—which answer I may give in all truth and confidence—that I know nothing at all about her. And to my knowledge——mind, I speak with this proviso, *to my knowledge*—I never saw her before in all my life."

"Why the deuce couldn't you have said so at once?"—and Lord Saxondale broke away from his guardian, who was perfectly confounded by what, in diplomatic terms, he would have denominated the "inconvenience" of so indecorous a remark.

Edmund, perceiving one of the other attachés to the embassy loitering at a little distance, and evidently gazing with mingled interest and admiration upon the beauteous stranger, hastened to accost him,—saying, "Sydney, my dear fellow, do you know who she is?"

"No—I was just thinking of asking some one the question. Isn't it strange that she should be thus left all to herself? We know very well that at these subscription balls almost any one may come: but still it is difficult to conceive that a lady, knowing what sort of a reception she is likely to meet, would voluntarily court such painful treatment as this. Besides, if it were anything very flagrant, the stewards would interfere. I have an uncommon great mind to run all risks and ask her to dance—only I am afraid of offending Petersfield. But I tell you what, Saxondale—if I were you, and independent of the old lord as you are, I wouldn't hesitate a moment. Why don't you go?"

"Well, I will," quickly responded the young nobleman, who only required some such suggestion as this to induce him to follow his inclinations. "But, stop, though! I see that Lord and Lady Petersfield are just going; and I may as well wait till they have taken their departure. They said that they should retire early; and as it happens, I am deuced glad of it."

It was as Edmund said: the old diplomatist and his wife were wending their way together towards the doors; and in a few moments they passed away from the scene of gaiety and splendour.

"Now, Saxondale," said the Hon. Mr. Sydney, principal paid attaché to Lord Petersfield.

"You shall see how nicely I will manage it," answered Edmund.

But he did not observe the ironical smile which appeared upon the lips of Mr. Sydney, who,—though he knew not the lady, nor anything concerning her,—nevertheless saw that there must be something very remarkable about her character for her to be thus shunned: and he was purposely urging Saxondale into a course which would make him appear pre-eminently ridiculous; for the young nobleman was in reality no favourite with the Hon. Mr. Sydney.

Edmund, assuming his most affable look, and walking with an affected mincing gait, approached the isolated lady; and with a very low bow, said, "Madam, shall I have the honour of your hand in the next dance?"

The lady, who had been looking over her fan and saw Lord Saxondale approach, at once raised herself up from the half-reclining and gracefully lounging attitude of seeming *nonchalance* and unconcern in which she had been sitting: and she responded with a smile of the most affable sweetness, "I thank your lordship—but I do not dance for the present. I have only recently recovered from a long and severe illness; and my physician has positively ordered that I do not over-exert myself."

While she thus spoke, she made a slight side-long movement, which seemed to be an invitation for Saxondale to take the chair next to her;—and completely infatuated, as well as dazzled and bewildered by the power of her charms, he unhesitatingly did so. Two things surprised him somewhat. One was that the lady evidently knew who he was—for she had addressed him as "my lord;" and the other was to hear her say that she had recently recovered from a severe illness; for certainly her appearance was very far from corroborating the averment. The hue of health, though of roseate delicacy, was upon her cheeks, which were plump and softly rounded; while the contours of her shape were totally devoid of that emaciation which long indisposition generally leaves behind it.

Those two things surprised him therefore; and there was a third circumstance which he specially noticed. This was, that as she had temporarily taken off the glove of her left hand, he saw that she wore a wedding-ring, and therefore was either a married woman or a widow. But these reflections were hurriedly made: for he found himself so completely under the empire of her charms—so intoxicated by the perfume of beauty, which, as it were, exhaled from her like fragrance from flowers—that he soon had no thought for anything else. He knew not what to say; and yet he scarcely felt awkward while gazing upon her in silence; for the feelings that inspired him were those of ineffable rapture.

"You have not been long in Paris, I believe, Lord Saxondale?" she said, at length breaking the silence; and her voice was clear and harmonious as a silver bell.

"Only a week, on the present occasion," he answered: "and it was my intention to leave to-morrow. But——"

"I understand your lordship," observed the lady, with another bewitching smile: "this Paris of our's has so many charms and fascinations, that you cannot readily tear yourself away from them?"

"You say this Paris of *your's*," remarked Saxondale, with a renewed feeling of surprise: "surely I have the honour of speaking to an English lady?"

"English by birth—but naturalised a Frenchwoman by marriage," she rejoined.

"Your husband is not here this evening?" observed Edmund inquiringly.

"My husband——is dead," returned the lady: and her face was bent downward with a sudden expression of profound mournfulness, which to Saxondale's eyes was but a new and more touching phase in which her beauty displayed itself.

"Pardon me, madam," he said, with an inward feeling of delight—though he scarcely knew why—to learn that she was a widow: "I did not intend to recall painful recollections."

"You must suppose, my lord, that my husband's

death was not a very recent occurrence—or else I should not be here, nor attired thus:"—and her exquisite blue eyes glanced quickly over her toilet. "I am therefore resigned to that loss which was at first a terrible blow to me. The Baron de Charlemont died two years ago. You are perhaps aware that he was a General of the Empire; and therefore," she added, gently and hesitatingly, "many years older than myself."

Saxondale had thus at length learnt who she was. He was talking to the Baroness de Charlemont—a lady of rank and title—most probably of fortune, considering the high position of her late husband. But he did not now pause to ask himself, nor even to throw out a hint of inquiry, how it was that she had been thus shunned, and that her presence had excited such a sensation of amazement in that assemblage? He had altogether forgotten the circumstance: he was under the spell of a loveliness which threw into the shade all the impressions which the beauty of either Florina Staunton or Emily Archer had ever made upon him. Nor did he notice that Mr. Sydney was surveying him with a mischievous look from a distance—or that his *tete-a-tete* with this lady had become an object of mingled wonderment and disgust on the part of all who were near enough to observe it. Heads were shaken ominously—strange mysterious looks were exchanged—and whispered observations were made. But nothing of all this did Edmund notice: he felt as much alone with the Baroness de Charlemont as if they were in reality altogether so. But she on her part could not help flinging an occasional look of exultant triumph towards those whose gaze was thus bent upon the spot where she was seated with her noble companion.

"I feel faint and ill," she suddenly observed, while her looks grew simultaneously languid. "I must retire——"

"Permit me to escort you hence?" Saxondale hastened to observe. "Have you a vehicle—— or——"

"My carriage is in attendance," she replied, at the same time accepting his proffered arm.

They walked out from the theatre together, followed by the eyes of the entire assemblage. A lady's-maid, who had been waiting in the shawl-room, hurried out the moment she caught sight of her mistress, whom she assisted to put on an elegant satin cloak, with a hood to draw partially over the head. Saxondale then conducted the Baroness down the staircase; and the cry of "Madame de Charlemont's carriage!" resounded through the air. A splendid equipage dashed up to the entrance of the theatre: Edmund handed the Baroness in—and then stood hesitating for a moment in what terms to proffer a request that he might be permitted to call upon her on the following day.

"Your lordship will sup with me," she said, with one of those bewitching smiles which had already made such havoc upon his heart: and all the fascinating sweetness of her countenance, as she thus spoke, was revealed by the strong glare which the lamps in the front of the theatre threw into the carriage.

"With pleasure," responded Saxondale to the invitation so enchantingly given: and the next moment he was seated by her side in the vehicle.

The lady's-maid entered also—the footman, who as well as the coachman was dressed in gorgeous livery, closed the door—and the equipage drove rapidly away.

CHAPTER CXVII.

THE BARONESS DE CHARLEMONT.

THE ride was not long: for the vehicle soon drove into the court-yard of a handsome house in the Rue de Tournon, near the palace of the Luxembourg. The footman opened the door: Edmund alighted, and then assisted his fair companion to descend. She took his arm, and led the way up a spacious well-lighted staircase, to a superbly furnished drawing-room. Requesting him to be seated, she said that she would be with him again in a few minutes—and retired in the company of her maid.

Lord Saxondale had now, for the first time since he accosted the Baroness de Charlemont at the theatre, a little leisure to reflect upon the adventure into which he had thus so precipitately plunged. He looked around, and perceived that the room was elegantly appointed: the furniture was rich and costly: in short, everything connected with the Baroness—her equipage—her domestics—her mansion—all appeared to denote the possession of ample means. That she was miraculously beautiful, was a truth which the impression made upon his heart, fully proclaimed. How was it, then, that with rank, wealth, and loveliness, she should have been so treated at the ball? It could scarcely be that her character was notoriously vile and depraved; because if so, the stewards of that ball would have certainly taken measures to convey to her an intimation that her presence was regarded as a general insult. They had done nothing of the sort: and yet had he seen her, not merely neglected, but absolutely shunned and avoided. It was a strange mystery; and Edmund could not form the slightest conjecture towards its unravelment. Passing away from that topic, his thoughts settled themselves completely upon the exceeding charms of her person. Never, he fancied to himself, had he beholden so splendid a creature in female shape. And she seemed perfectly modest and well-behaved likewise: her manners were not only those of a polished lady—but there was the fullest propriety investing them: for if her smiles had been fraught with such ravishing effects, she was not to be blamed for their magic power; and in bestowing those smiles, in harmony as it were with her discourse, there was nothing forward, bold, nor immodest.

While Saxondale was thus absorbed in his raptured reverie, the Baroness returned to the apartment. She had made no change in her toilet, beyond laying aside the cloak, her gloves, and her fan; and as she entered, Saxondale, rising out of respect, was again completely dazzled and bewildered by the glory of her beauty. She requested him to resume his seat; and placing herself near him, she said, "I now take the opportunity, my lord, to thank you for an act of generosity which you performed this evening, and to which I did not choose to make pointed allusion until a fitting opportunity. A few words of explanation may be necessary. I regret to say that *your* countrywomen—for naturalised on the French soil as I am, I can

no longer call them *mine*—are devoured with jealousy because nature has happened to render me not very ill-looking. As for the gentlemen, both married and single have persecuted me with their addresses—the former, as a matter of course, being anything but honourable: for such is too often the custom in this dissipated city of Paris. It is supposed that a young widow must either take another husband, or else a lover: I have had offers of both kinds—I have refused them all—the former with a respectful gratitude, the latter with indignation. But my conduct has made me enemies; and the result has been the treatment which, as you saw, I experienced to-night. Now my resolve is taken: I shall leave Paris to-morrow—and for ever!"

"But whither will you go?" inquired Saxondale, who in his infatuation gave the most implicit credence to every syllable of the Baroness de Charlemont's long speech; and no wonder—for it was accompanied with so much tender pathos, alike of looks and accents, that it rivetted the impression which the brilliancy of her beauty had already made upon his heart. "Whither will you go?" he repeated, in a voice which implied that wheresoever she might proceed, thither was he resolved to repair likewise.

"I shall return to the capital of my own native land," she answered: "I shall go to London. If I had any relatives yet living, either on my own or my husband's side, I should not be without the escort of suitable companionship: but I have none—and I must go alone!"

"No—not alone!" ejaculated Edmund. "Permit me to be that escort which you seem to desire?"

The Baroness bent upon Saxondale a look beaming with gratitude: but ere she could give any reply, the footman entered to announce that supper was served up. Edmund proffered his arm: she took it—and they followed the domestic to an adjacent apartment. It was a smaller one than the drawing-room—most luxuriously furnished—and where an exquisite supper was spread upon the table. There was champagne in ice, together with other choice wines; and on the sideboard appeared a dessert of delicious autumnal fruits. The Baroness motioned the domestic to retire—a proceeding quite consistent with the fashion of little Parisian suppers of this description.

Lord Saxondale placed himself at table with his beautiful hostess; and as he drank glass after glass of the exhilarating champagne, the fumes of the wine added to the intoxicating influence of her transcending loveliness. He felt that he could make any sacrifice, if need were, to possess so splendid a creature either as mistress or wife: he was already profoundly in love—if love it might be called which such a heart as his could experience, and which was excited through the medium of the sense and not of the sentiment. It never occurred to him that he himself, being no Adonis, could not possibly have captivated the heart of this lady so suddenly and completely as she had ensnared his own: his natural vanity would not permit him to make such a reflection; and therefore he flattered himself that the increasing tenderness of her looks and the growing friendliness of her manner, were indicative of the same passion on her part as that which he felt.

"And you have decided," he said, "upon taking your departure to-morrow?"

"Yes—beyond all doubt," responded the Baroness. "I can endure this Paris no longer."

"And you will permit me to accompany you?" he quickly exclaimed.

"Have you no one whose consent you must ask?" she inquired. "Is not Lord Petersfield your guardian? and must you not, in consequence of the post you hold in his embassy, abide by his will, even apart from that species of parental power which he wields over you?"

"Nothing of the kind!" ejaculated Edmund: "it was by my own free consent that I accompanied him on his mission;—indeed, the proposal emanated direct from myself. As for his guardianship, I am fully and completely my own master, in consequence of a certain compact with my mother."

"Your mother, then," observed the Baroness, as if quite in a conversational manner, "has no influence over your proceedings?"

"None—none whatsoever! I should think not indeed!" cried Edmund: and he helped himself to another glass of champagne.

"But you are not yet of age?"

"No—not yet. Nevertheless I can do just as I choose: and what is more, I intend to do so. So your ladyship sees that I am completely my own master: and how can I better dispose of my time, than in escorting you to London? You must not travel alone. Only think of the inconveniences!—and believe me when I assure you that it would afford me such pleasure to be your escort——"

"But how singular it will seem!" exclaimed the Baroness, with an arch smile. "A young nobleman such as you, to accompany a young widow as I am! The world will point to us—the tongue of scandal will be busy——No, my lord," she added, suddenly becoming serious; "it cannot be. Do not misunderstand me. It was through gratitude that I invited you to my home: and moreover, the usages of Parisian society do not stamp with indiscretion such a proceeding. A married lady or a widow may entertain a friend thus; and it *is* as a friend that I regard you—for circumstances suddenly placed us in that light——at least, if you will permit me to say so."

"A friend!" exclaimed Saxondale. "Would to heaven that I were something more to you than that! Friendship is so cold a term——"

"But the only one that can be used by persons who have known each other for only a few hours. Now, with regard to this journey of mine," continued the Baroness, "your lordship must understand full well that you could accompany me only in the position of a lover—to be explicit, I must rather say as a paramour—or else as one destined to be my husband. Not for a moment can the former be dreamt of! I value my reputation—and I have my own womanly pride. No—never will I peril that reputation by any indiscretion on my part: much less could I consent to step down from the pedestal on which I have hitherto maintained my stand. No, my lord—you cannot accompany me: you see that it is impossible."

"Say not the word *impossible!*" exclaimed Saxondale, more than half intoxicated with wine and love: then falling at the feet of the Baroness de Charlemont, he took her hand; and pressing it to his lips,

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sried, "Let it be as your intended husband that I shall accompany you! Yes—let it be in that light! I already know you as well and love you as much as if our acquaintance had been that of years instead of hours. I entreat you——"

"My lord, rise—I beseech you, rise!" said the Baroness, appearing to be profoundly agitated; and she did not withdraw the hand which Saxondale continued to press rapturously to his lips.

He did rise: and he stood by her side, as she remained seated. She looked up into his countenance with eyes that seemed full of tenderness: and he observed that her bosom was swelling and heaving as if with the tumult of the feelings that worked within. The rose upon her cheeks had deepened into carnation: there was a moisture upon her lips that made them seem richer and more luscious than was even their natural wont: her whole appearance breathed a softly sensuous languor. Saxondale's passions were excited almost to madness. Had Satan stood by his side and demanded the eventual transfer of his soul, in recompense for handing over to him the possession of this enchanting woman, he would have greedily assented to the compact. The perfume of her beauty appeared to arise around him like the overpowering fragrance of flowers. The light streaming from the chandelier suspended to the ceiling, shed its lustre upon her head, making her hair shine like a veil of burnished gold floating down upon her polished shoulders and over her back: her complexion, save where the carnation hues were upon the cheeks, was white and pure as the lily, and exquisitely diaphanous. Upon her brow was the delicate tracery of blue veins, seen through that pellucid skin. One hand, which hung drooping over the arm of the chair, seemed to be drinking into its pores of pearl the light that flooded the room: the other hand, which Saxondale held in his own, felt warm and tremulous in his clasp.

More than a minute elapsed while she sat thus looking up at him with that softly voluptuous expression,—and while he stood gazing down upon her, devouring with his regards that splendid countenance, and suffering his wanton imagination to complete the rounded forms of the bust whereof somewhat was exposed to the view. Yes—he could have sacrificed his very soul to possess this woman, so great was the empire which her charms had obtained over him in the short space of two or three hours.

"You have made me a proposal," she said, in a subdued and tremulous voice, "which, were I a young creature of six or eight years less than I am, and feeling towards you what I do, I should perhaps at once accept. But I do not thus precipitately bind you to a compact which you may perhaps repent to-morrow."

"Repent? No—never, never!" exclaimed Saxondale: and again he fell upon his knees at her feet. "Have I not told you that I am my own master? Hear me, then, while I solemnly avow my affection towards you!—hear me while I proclaim once more that I already love you as if we had known each other for years! I offer to make you the sharer of my rank, and the partner of my fortune when on coming of age I shall inherit it. If upon these conditions you will suffer me to accompany you to London, where we can be united—or if to-morrow you will bestow upon me your hand, so that I may at once acquire a legal and moral right to be the companion of your journey, and to remain with you for ever henceforth—be it so! It is for you to decide: but keep me not in suspense!"

"What can I say to you? how can I resist these entreaties, so vehement—so passionate?" murmured the Baroness de Charlemont: and bending forward, she drooped her blushing countenance upon the shoulder of him who was still kneeling at her feet.

Edmund threw his arms about her neck, and strained her in his embrace. He covered her cheeks with kisses: they were warm and glowing, those softly rounded cheeks;—and from her lips, too, did he cull the most exquisite sweets.

"Rise, Edmund—rise," she said, after a few moments of this amorous play: "rise, I entreat you! —the domestics may enter! But if you await my decision, have it——I will become your wife."

Again he pressed her in his arms: he would have grown bolder than the mere taking of those warm kisses—but she gently though firmly disengaged herself from his embrace; and compelling him to resume his seat, she said, "But to-morrow, perhaps, you will repent of this offer you have made? you will look back with regret on what may appear the folly of your conduct? Friends may advise you——"

"No—I shall consult them not," interrupted Edmund vehemently. "Do you think that where my happiness is at stake, I am not the best judge of how to ensure it? Besides," he added, "when I return to the hotel presently, I shall see no one to annoy or trouble me with questions; and in the morning I will rise very early—order my valet to pack up my things—and come hither at once straight to you. May I be permitted to regard this arrangement as settled?"

"Yes—if you wish it to be so," responded the Baroness, with downcast eyes and blushing countenance: then after a pause, she went on to observe, "But our hands cannot be united here in Paris: nor indeed anywhere in France. I am a Protestant—as I believe you are; and nowhere save at the chapel of the British Embassy can a legal ceremony be solemnized between us in this country. There, as you are known, you might meet with obstructions. We will without delay proceed to London——"

"And *there* can our hands be united at once!" ejaculated Edmund, enraptured at the idea of possessing that splendid woman as his wife.

"To-morrow morning, therefore," she resumed, "will I have a travelling-carriage in readiness at eight o'clock. You will be here to breakfast with me soon after seven. Your own valet and my maid will alone accompany us. I shall leave a letter for my notary, directing him to dispose of my furniture and my equipages—dismiss my servants—and let my mansion. For believe me, dear Edmund, it will never be my wish to return to this Paris, of the heartlessness and the depravity of whose fashionable sphere I am thoroughly sickened."

"You will do well to make up your mind thus," responded the infatuated young nobleman: "for when once my wife, you will become mistress of a mansion in London, as well as of a castle in Lincolnshire; and proud shall I be to place you at the head of those establishments."

"But your mother, Edmund—and I believe you have sisters too——"

"What of them?" he ejaculated. "One of my sisters is married to a French nobleman; and they are at Madrid. My mother and my eldest sister are at present staying in France—I don't exactly know where. I was at Vienna when they left England: but from letters that I received, there seems to have been some precious scene at the castle in Lincolnshire, the rights of which I have not exactly learnt. However, it's very certain that neither my mother nor sisters are in England now; and even if they were, it would not be of any consequence—for I know a secret or two about my mother that would prevent her from daring to interfere with my proceedings."

"You must understand, Edmund," said the Baroness de Charlemont, "that if I so often allude apprehensively to Lady Saxondale, it is because I should be sorry indeed to lead you into open rebellion against her. Not, however," she added proudly, "but that the widow of a General of the Empire and a Peer of France may well aspire to an alliance with the heir of Saxondale. It is the discrepancy of our ages—and the suddenness of the attachment which you have formed—that might be regarded as objections. But after the assurances you have given me, that you are so entirely your own master, I will say nothing more upon the subject. There is however one thing I have to mention——and pardon me, my dear Edmund, if I touch upon so delicate a topic. I know that young men are often extravagant, and that they go beyond the means allowed by their parents or guardians. If you have any little liabilities to settle before you leave Paris, and for which you reckoned upon the purse of Lord Petersfield, do not hesitate to make me your banker. I have in this writing-desk a quantity of notes and gold——You must not be offended at what I am saying: inasmuch," she added, again with blushing cheeks, "as in a few days everything we mutually possess will be thrown into a common stock."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks," exclaimed Saxondale, "for this proof of confidence and love on your part: but fortunately I require no assistance—I have ample funds at my own disposal."

The Baroness de Charlemont, who had risen from her seat as she spoke and was proceeding to unlock her writing-desk, turned towards Edmund, and said with the sweetest of all sweet smiles, "You are sure that your calculation is correct and that you require nothing?"

"Nothing now but another kiss from those dear lips!"—and rising also from his seat, he threw his arms about the lady's neck and strained her once more to his breast.

Five minutes afterwards he was retracing his way in a street-vehicle to the hotel where he lodged; and during the half-hour's drive thither he continued to dwell with rapture upon the image of the beautiful Baroness de Charlemont. On reaching the hotel, he was about to hurry up to his own chamber,—when his valet informed him that Lord Petersfield, who had remained sitting up for his return, desired most particularly to see him before he retired to rest. Edmund, excited with wine, and infatuated in his purpose of adhering to all his promises to the Baroness de Charlemont, was at first half inclined to disobey Lord Petersfield's request: for he had little doubt that it was with regard to this lady his lordship meant to speak to him. But a second thought made him resolve to see his guardian, the better to avert suspicion from his plan of rising early and quitting the hotel by stealth. He accordingly proceeded to the apartment where Lord Petersfield had been passing the time in the study of certain diplomatic papers the contents of which he already had at his finger's ends.

"This is a pretty hour for you to come in, Lord Saxondale," began Petersfield, drawing himself up with an air of awful solemnity as he slowly drew forth his watch. "It is one in the morning; and you know that we have to take our departure—I will not say *to-morrow*, because the morrow is already entered upon—or at least the morning——"

"And so much the greater reason, my lord," returned Edmund, "why you and I should toddle up to our bed-rooms."

"What?" said Lord Petersfield, perfectly aghast, "did you use the word *toddle?*—toddle to me! her Majesty's Ambassador Extraordinary to the Imperial Court of Vienna!——toddle to me, a Peer of the realm! Pray, Lord Saxondale, do I look like a person who is accustomed to toddle? Don't answer precipitately—take time to reflect. I should not like to speak unadvisedly: but I do not mind for once in a way hazarding a conjecture—which is that *you*, Lord Saxondale, are inebriated."

"I drunk!" cried the young nobleman. "I am as sober as a judge——never more sober in my life. But come—why did you want to see me?"

"It was fortunate, Lord Saxondale," resumed Petersfield, "that on coming back from the ball, I had occasion to sit up and peruse some of these documents——I say *fortunate*, inasmuch as it put me in the way of learning, on Mr. Sydney's return, that you had positively and actually—though I should not say so of my own knowledge—but were it a written deposition, I should put it in this light, that 'the undersigned has learnt with great sorrow and regret that Lord Saxondale, contrary to all conventional usages——'"

"Pray, my lord, do come to the point at once," interrupted Edmund. "I am getting as sleepy as any owl. And you," he added, in an under-tone, "are certainly as stupid as one."

"An owl, Edmund? an owl, Lord Saxondale? Did you say an owl?"—and Petersfield, who had caught the young nobleman's words, now looked positively awful. "Do you think that her Majesty's Government would send an owl to transact its business? Don't answer in a hurry—but tell me, having weighed the question well, whether I look like an owl?"

"Most uncommonly!" ejaculated Edmund, in a thorough pet: and he flung himself out of the room, leaving the door wide open: then rushing up to his own chamber, he locked himself in with his valet.

To this individual, in whom he knew that he could fully confide, he communicated his plan of leaving the hotel a little before seven o'clock,—without however entering into much farther explanation. The domestic hastily began packing up his young master's effects; and in less than half-an-hour these preparations were completed. The valet then retired to his own room; and Saxondale fell

into a sound sleep, to dream of the splendid Baroness de Charlemont.

Meanwhile Lord Peterafield had ascended to the chamber where his wife was already wrapped in the arms of slumber; and a very awful aspect had the ancient diplomatist—for though pretty well accustomed to his ward's freaks and humours, yet he felt that he never could forgive his having called him—yes, *him*, her Majesty's Ambassador Extraordinary—an owl! The reader has of course understood that Lord Peterafield had intended to take Saxondale to task for his conduct in respect to the Baroness de Charlemont: but the castigation, as well as whatsoever explanations might have accompanied it, were altogether cut short by Edmund's abrupt departure from the room.

A little before seven o'clock the faithful valet tapped gently at the door of his young master's chamber: but Edmund was already up and nearly dressed. The hotel-porter was in readiness to convey the trunks down stairs—a hackney-coach was summoned—and Lord Saxondale effected his escape without the cognizance of his guardian. In half-an-hour he alighted at the mansion of the Baroness de Charlemont in the Rue de Tournon—and was at once conducted to an apartment, where an excellent breakfast was spread upon the table. The Baroness soon made her appearance: Edmund flew towards her and caught her in his arms,—she rapturously returning his embrace.

She was dressed for travelling. Her hair, which on the previous night she had worn in such luxuriant curls and tresses, was now gathered up in massive bands,—resting like dark gold on either side of her ivory forehead. She appeared to equal advantage in the day-time as in the evening when surrounded by a flood of lustre: for nothing could exceed the fairness of her skin, nor the purity of the roseate tint upon her cheeks. Her balmy breath, respired between the bright red lips, seemed like a zephyr gathering sweets from the roses amidst which it passed; and in her looks there was the animation of happiness, blended with that soft sensuous languor which habitually characterised them. The dress that she now wore ascended to her throat, and fitted tight to the shape,—thus developing to even greater advantage than the evening toilet, the admirable symmetry and rich contours of her shape. The morning's reflection had in no way diminished the infatuation which her charms had inspired on the previous evening in respect to Saxondale: but even if such were the case, all the ardour of his passion would have been excited anew on beholding the Baroness as she now appeared. He thought, as his arm encircled her waist, and he felt the heaving of her superb bust against his chest—and as he culled kiss after kiss from her moist red lips—and beheld pleasure dancing softly and sensuously in the blue depths of her large swimming eyes,—that he was indeed fortunate in possessing the love of such a woman, and of having the prospect in a short time to present her to the world as his wife.

The repast was soon finished: for he was in a hurry to commence the journey—and she appeared to have no wish for delay. A travelling-carriage was in readiness soon after eight: he and the Baroness seated themselves side by side in the interior, the maid with them—his valet occupied the box—the postilions cracked their whips—and the equipage rolled out of the court-yard of the mansion in the Rue de Tournon.

Meanwhile Edmund's stealthy departure from the hotel, in company with his valet, was communicated to Lord Peterafield. This nobleman, at once suspecting (in consequence of all he had heard from Mr. Sydney on the previous night) that his ward was enamored by the Baroness de Charlemont, sent that gentleman and another *attaché* to the mansion in the Rue de Tournon, in order to obtain an immediate interview with Edmund, and make him a certain communication, which it was hoped would at once put an end to the newly-formed connexion. But the *attachés* arrived a quarter of an hour too late: Edmund and the Baroness were gone.

CHAPTER CXVIII.

THE INN AT BEAUVAIS.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, that the travelling-carriage rolled into the town of Beauvais, and stopped at the principal hotel, where it was purposed to take some refreshment. The Baroness, attended by her maid, ascended to a chamber that she might make some change in her toilet—for the October evening threatened to set in cold. In the meantime, Lord Saxondale, being shown to a private sitting-room, gave the requisite orders for the prompt serving up of a repast. When the waiter, to whom his instructions were issued, had retired, Edmund loinged towards the window, which looked upon the court-yard of the hotel: but scarcely had he approached the casement, when he was struck with surprise on beholding Lord Harold Staunton issue from a doorway in the range of buildings on the opposite side. Harold was smoking a cigar; and by the manner in which he began to loiter negligently about, was evidently stopping at the hotel. Happening to raise his eyes, he caught sight of Saxondale, and appeared equally astonished to behold him there. For a few moments no farther sign of recognition took place between them: but Staunton, probably thinking that the origin of their quarrel at Emily Archer's ville was foolish enough—or else being anxious to renew his intimacy with Edmund—at length gave him a familiar nod, accompanied with a smile which plainly intimated his wish to be on good terms.

Edmund, on the other hand, had his own reasons for desiring to converse with Staunton. He had learnt, when at Vienna, a few meagre details of the incidents which had taken place at Saxondale Castle in Lincolnshire; and he was naturally curious to know more. Accordingly, in response to that nod which Lord Harold had given him, he made a sign to the effect that he would come down and join him in the court-yard of the hotel: and thither he at once repaired.

"Well, Saxondale," Staunton immediately exclaimed, as he extended his hand, "I suppose there is no farther ill-will between us?"

"Not a bit!" answered Edmund: and they shook hands accordingly. "But what the deuce has brought you hither?"

"Rather," rejoined Staunton, "let me ask what you are doing here? I thought you were with Lord Peterafield in Vienna."

"The embassy is on its way home—Petersfield is in Paris—or rather, I believe he also must have left this morning: for we have parted company."

"And you are on your way to England, I suppose?" said Lord Harold. "I am stopping here for a day or two: I rather took a fancy to the place—there is some good partridge-shooting in the neighbourhood—and as I have nothing better to do, I thought I would kill time a little at Beauvais."

"Do tell me, Harold," said Lord Saxondale, drawing his friend a little further up the court-yard, "all about those affairs that took place at the castle some six or seven weeks back."

"What! are you not thoroughly acquainted with them? is it possible you have not heard everything?"

"I only learnt this much," replied Edmund—"that you were going to marry my mother, and a certain Mr. Hawkshaw was to marry Juliana—but that the Marquis of Eagledean, who had suddenly arrived from Italy, came at the very nick of time, and took you away; and that Hawkshaw learnt something which induced him to break off the match with Juliana. That is all I know."

"And this *something* in respect to your sister," said Lord Harold, eyeing Edmund in a peculiar manner,—"do you really mean to tell me——"

"That I know nothing about it. Upon my honour I do not; and I wish you would tell me. I dare say," continued Edmund, in his wonted flippant manner, "that she flirted with somebody else—or some such nonsense of that kind."

"Flirted indeed!" echoed Staunton: "she had done something more than flirt. The exposure was terrific: I never saw anything like it. Why, my dear Edmund, your sister is in the family-way."

"The deuce?" ejaculated the young nobleman. "But Hawkshaw——"

"No—not by him: and this part of the secret I don't know myself. But true enough it was—and Juliana did not deny it."

"But in respect to yourself, Harold?—I was perfectly astounded when I first learnt that you intended to marry my mother; and then I laughed heartily at the idea of one with whom I had had so many gay frolics, becoming my father-in-law. What a nice father-in-law you would have made! But was it true that your old uncle arrived suddenly?"

"Suddenly indeed! He had been in England for some time. Would you believe it?—that Mr. Gunthorpe and the Marquis of Eagledean were one and the same person."

For a few moments Edmund looked astounded: and then bursting out into a fit of laughter, he said, "I suppose he had not forgotten the fun we had with him in Jermyn Street—and how nicely we did him out of those five thousand pounds? But has he sent you to travel for the benefit of your health, that we thus meet upon the Continent?"

"That is precisely what he has done," responded Harold. "He ordered me to come abroad with a moderate allowance—on probation for a year; and if I behave well and don't run into debt, or get into any scrapes, he will make me a handsome allowance. So you see," added Staunton, with an ironical smile, "I am on my best behaviour. I have been at Bruges in Belgium for some weeks past for the Marquis sent me abroad immediately after that affair at Saxondale Castle. Bruges is a precious dull place; and so I went to Boulogne the other day: but liking that still less, I thought I would come on by short stages to Paris. And here you find me on my way thither."

"And do you really intend to turn over a new leaf and be steady?" inquired Saxondale, with a mischievous smile.

"I don't know what the devil to do," responded Staunton. "I feel like a wandering spirit. You see, I am completely dependent on my uncle; and I must at all events try to be as steady as possible—for I have no doubt he will watch me from a distance. Would you believe it?—that scoundrel Alfred——"

"Your valet? I thought he was such a good fellow—such a prize—such a valuable domestic."

"The villain! he was a spy upon my actions—he told my uncle everything."

"Indeed! I should not have thought he could have proved so treacherous. Of course he is not with you any longer?"

"Oh, no—my uncle rewarded him, and he is gone into another situation. But I have something more to tell you: this uncle of mine has recently married."

"Married!" exclaimed Saxondale. "What? to cut you out of the title and estates."

"I hope and trust that such will not be the case," answered Staunton, a shade coming over his countenance. "I could endure anything but *that*. But is it possible that you are so ignorant of all the things that have taken place?——have you not heard from your mother or sister?"

"Not a line—not a syllable. They are not likely to write to me. The little I heard about the affairs down in Lincolnshire, was from Lord Petersfield, who had a letter from Malton; and his lordship, you know, is not over communicative upon any subject. But what more have you to tell me?"

"That young Francis Paton——"

"Ah! the page that my mother once had at Saxondale House?"

"The very same. He is none other than my uncle's son: illegitimate of course—or else it would be at once a blow to my hopes. And there is a daughter too——"

"These *are* wonders! Pray whom," inquired Saxondale, "has your uncle married?"

"The mother of his two illegitimate children—Lady Everton that was."

"And now, tell me wherefore this uncle of your's should have been so terribly averse to your marriage with my mother?"

"I think, Edmund," answered Lord Harold Staunton, his countenance becoming serious, "that this is really too delicate a point for me to touch upon with Lady Saxondale's son. But by the bye, do you happen to know where your mother and sister are?—for I believe that they left England immediately after the events in Lincolnshire—and it was rumoured they went to take up their abode at some out of the way place in Ireland."

"Very far from it," responded Saxondale: "for they are somewhere in France—but where I cannot say. All I know is, that Malton told Lord Petersfield so in the letter of which I have already spoken."

"In France?" ejaculated Staunton: then in an

under-tone, he said to himself, "I think if my uncle had known this, he would not have sent me to travel on the Continent, for fear I might fall in with Lady Saxondale, and marry her yet. But there is no fear of that!"—and the young nobleman's countenance again darkened into sinister gloom.

"What are you muttering to yourself?" inquired Edmund.

"Nothing—nothing," quickly responded Staunton. "But now tell me about yourself. Are you in a hurry to get back to England? Can't you, for old acquaintance' sake, remain here a day or two and bear me company?"

"Impossible! The truth is," continued Edmund, with a very mysterious look and in a confidential manner, "I am travelling with a lady——Ah! my dear Harold, such a conquest I have made! Never in all your life have you seen such a splendid creature! Forgive me for saying that she is much handsomer than your sister Florina——And by the bye, now I understand how it was that that meddling old humbug Gunthorpe, as I supposed him to be—but the Marquis of Eagledean as you tell me he really is—broke off that match between Florina and me."

"And do you know, Edmund," said Lord Harold, "on whom my uncle purposes to bestow Florina's hand? On that very William Deveril——"

"With whom you had the duel—the painter on ivory—and to whom my mother took such a fancy! Is it possible? And I was jilted by Florina for such a fellow as that! and your uncle preferred a beggarly artist instead of a young nobleman like me, with rank and fortune, and who traces his descent from the Tudors!"

"A descent from the Tudors is perhaps a very fine thing, Edmund," responded Harold, with a half-subdued ironical smile; "but it is not the less a fact that my uncle prefers the ivory-painter as a husband for his niece: and what is more, my aunt Lady Macdonald appears to be of the same way of thinking. But about this lady of your's? Do you mean that it is a conquest in the shape of a mistress——"

"No—Oh no! She is a paragon of virtue—a very phœnix of perfection——"

"And yet you tell me that you are travelling with this paragon and phœnix," observed Lord Harold. "I presume therefore that she has her parents with her?"

"No: her parents are dead—she has no relations, either to protect her or interfere with her—she is a widow. But of course she has her maid with her—and I have my valet; and therefore it is all respectable and straightforward enough."

"And you intend to marry her?" observed Harold interrogatively, his haughtily handsome lip at the same time slightly wreathing with a sneer.

"Of course I do!" exclaimed Edmund; "and I consider myself the happiest of men. I tell you again, Staunton, that in loveliness of person she is unrivalled. Poor Emily Archer was nothing to her. Ah! you may well look queer when I mention the name——"

"How, queer? what do you mean?" demanded Harold, with a sudden start: and the expression of his countenance was certainly very peculiar at the moment.

"Now don't annoy yourself in respect to the past, my dear Staunton," replied Saxondale. "I was not going to reproach you for that little business which took place at Evergreen Villa, when I found you concealed in poor Emily's bed-chamber——Wasn't it a shocking thing that she should have met her death in such a way? But by the bye, now that I recollect, you were in Lincolnshire at the time—you were staying at the Castle. Did suspicion light upon any persons in particular? I fancy not, from what I read in the papers."

"I knew but little about it," answered Harold, turning half aside to knock the long ash off his cigar. "The fact is, I was confined to my bed at the time by a very severe and dangerous fall I had from a horse—one of Hawkshaw's horses, too. But to return once more to this lady of your's——I am not indiscreet enough to propose to thrust myself upon your privacy——"

"No—it wouldn't do," quickly rejoined Edmund. "You see, we have not known each other long; and so it is natural we should like to be together as much as possible—and she has conceived such a passionate fondness towards me——"

"Oh! quite natural, no doubt!" ejaculated Lord Harold, with another half-repressed sneer, but which Edmund still failed to perceive. "I repeat that I do not seek to force myself upon you. I am only asking about the lady on account of old friendship with you and through passing curiosity. I hope it will be a good match for your sake;—and knowing what an experienced fellow you are in the ways of the world, I have no doubt you are taking good care of yourself in the matter."

"Yes—I believe that I am tolerably wide awake," observed Edmund, complacently stroking his beardless chin. "A person must get up rather early in the morning to take me in. But of course it is improper to a degree, as well as ridiculous, to speak thus in respect to a lady of rank, distinction, and fortune—the widow of a General in the French army and a Peer of France."

"Ah! then your phœnix and paragon is a French lady?" observed Harold.

"No—she is an English lady; but she married the French General—and he died a couple of years ago."

"Well, it does look a straightforward affair," said Harold. "But would it be indiscreet to inquire her ladyship's name?"

"The Baroness de Charlemont," rejoined Saxondale.

"The Baroness de Charlemont?" echoed Staunton in amazement: but Edmund fancied it to be in admiration of the euphonious grandeur of the title.

At this moment the waiter accosted him, with a hasty announcement that dinner was served up, and that his presence was awaited. He accordingly ejaculated forth a hurried "Farewell" to Lord Harold; and broke away from him, as the latter attempted to detain him.

"Well, let the silly fool have his own way," muttered Staunton to himself: and lounging up the court-yard, he continued whiffing his cigar.

Half-an-hour afterwards he saw Lord Saxondale hand the Baroness de Charlemont into the carriag : but not choosing to exhibit any curiosity to obtain a nearer view of the lady—whom indeed he had never before seen, but only heard of—he continued at a distance. The vehicle rolled out of

the establishment: and the sounds of its wheels as well as the cracking of the postilions' whips soon ceased to meet his ears.

It was now past four o'clock; and Staunton did not dine till six. Time hung somewhat heavily on his hands; and he accordingly lighted another cigar, with the intention of strolling through the town to while away an hour or so. But just as he was issuing forth from the gateway of the hotel, a post-chaise drove up and began to turn into the court-yard. Lord Harold, perceiving two ladies inside, lingered with the idle curiosity of a young man to catch a glimpse of their countenances,—when to his surprise he at once recognised Lady Saxondale and Juliana. They did not observe him; and immediately alighting from the carriage, they entered the hotel, where they were shown to private apartments, as they intended to rest and dine ere they pursued their journey.

Lord Harold's first impulse was to continue his walk through the town: but scarcely was he moving away from the hotel, when an irresistible feeling made him turn back; and the thought arose within him that he should like to have an interview with Lady Saxondale. It was one of those mysterious inclinations which sometimes seize upon human beings, and for which they can scarcely account. We should observe that when first separated by his uncle from Lady Saxondale, he had rejoiced that he had not indissolubly linked his destiny with her's. Deep in his soul was the conviction that she had made him *something* which he was not before the intimacy of his connexion with her commenced; and therefore, when removed from the sphere of her dazzling charms, he had felt that he was happily rescued from the power of a Circe capable of practising the most dreadful spells. Thus, when he had ere now muttered to himself, in the court-yard of the hotel, that if he encountered Lady Saxondale again there was no fear of his wishing to marry her, he had really thought what he had thus expressed. Nor indeed were his sentiments now changed, or even impaired, in respect to that aversion to a matrimonial connexion with her ladyship,—inasmuch as her reputation was ruined in the world on account of all that had occurred at Saxondale Castle; and it was by no means likely that Harold Staunton would take such a woman as his wife. But on the other hand the impression of her voluptuous beauty was powerfully resuscitated in his mind; and it was perhaps for this reason that he longed for another interview with her. He lingered therefore hesitatingly at the gate of the hotel. Yes—he hesitated: for a sudden fear had arisen in his mind. What if he were watched by any spy or emissary of his uncle? —that uncle on whom he was so perfectly dependent! But no: it could scarcely be that his actions were thus espied. He was travelling unattended: there was no bribable valet to keep him under *surveillance*: he had not noticed during his sojourn of a few weeks on the Continent, that he had been followed by any individual: nothing suspicious had occurred to warrant such a belief;—and thus, after a little consideration, he came to the conclusion that the fear he had expressed to Lord Saxondale in respect to such an *espionnage*, was unfounded. Besides, when a person is more than half resolved to pursue some particular course, his imagination will suggest a dozen arguments for adopting it in opposition to every single one against it, and will likewise conjure up an abundance of reasoning to triumph over all apprehension. In a word, therefore, Lord Harold Staunton came to the conclusion to seek an interview with Lady Saxondale.

Passing into the hotel, he gave his card to the waiter,—bidding him take it up to the elder of the two ladies who had just arrived in the post-chaise. A few minutes afterwards the waiter re-appeared, with an intimation that Lady Saxondale would have great pleasure in seeing Lord Harold Staunton. The young nobleman was accordingly conducted up to a sitting apartment, where her ladyship awaited him. She was *alone*: for Juliana, on hearing from her mother that Lord Harold was at the hotel, had declined to see him. She was ashamed, after the terrific exposure at Saxondale Castle, to meet any one who was a witness of that painful scene, and who was consequently acquainted with her flagrant shame. Thus while she remained in a bed-chamber, arranging her toilet, which was disordered by many hours' travelling,—her mother received Lord Harold Staunton.

Her ladyship was standing when Harold entered the room; and he, advancing towards her, was prepared to display an equivalent amount of courtesy to that which he himself might receive. But Lady Saxondale was cold and distant: she did not proffer her hand;—and by the fact of receiving him standing, appeared to indicate that though she had not refused the interview, she was surprised that it had been sought, and wished its object to be promptly explained. Her countenance was somewhat careworn: but in other respects the grandeur of her beauty was not impaired during the interval of a few weeks since Harold had last seen her in Lincolnshire.

"Perhaps you are astonished to behold me here?" he said, adopting as off-hand and easy a tone and manner as he could well call to his aid to rescue him from the awkwardness of the position in which he had thus placed himself.

"I presume you have a motive in seeking an interview," answered her ladyship coldly; "and I therefore beg that you will at once reveal it."

"I should have thought that after everything which has taken place between us," replied Harold, "and which consists of ties even more binding than those of a mere passing amour,—two individuals thus situated might have something to say to each other. For my own part, I must candidly confess that I had no special object in view: but with equal truth may I aver that I was impelled to seek this interview by some power that was irresistible."

"Of what use is it for us to talk of the past," inquired Lady Saxondale bitterly, "inasmuch as nothing that has been done can be recalled? But if there be aught that may be done *for the future*, and concerning which you would seek my counsel, you shall have it. Speak."

There was a certain mysterious significancy in Lady Saxondale's words and looks towards the latter part of her speech, that at once convinced Harold she had something in her mind; and his evil genius prompted him to ascertain what it was.

"I know not," he said, "that I have any counsel to ask: but it is possible—and indeed I think it

probable—that you may have something to suggest."

"Be seated:"—and Lady Saxondale took a chair, while she motioned Staunton to do the same: then, fixing upon him one of those regards in which the full power of her soul appeared to look out, sinister and mysterious, from her large dark eyes, she said, "Am I to suppose that you are still a mere weak child, tremblingly obedient to the will of a despot uncle?"

"I am afraid, Harriet," returned Staunton, "that you have expressed something which, though cuttingly severe, does but too closely approximate the truth."

"Then where is your courage," she asked scornfully and disdainfully, "that you thus consent tamely to be lashed liked the meanest hound? The very worm will turn against the heel of the strong man who tramples upon it: but you appear not to have even the courage of that worm!"—and still as she spoke her eyes were fixed upon him with a fascinating influence, and at the same time with a significancy that began to suggest strange and terrible things.

"Believe me," he answered, "that there are moments when my soul revolts against this tyranny to which I am bound hand and foot. Sometimes I even gnash my teeth with rage; and I long to rebel against the despot who tramples upon me."

"Ah! you long to rebel?" ejaculated Lady Saxondale. "Am I to suppose, then, that you have not the courage?"

"The courage? Yes!" replied Harold resolutely. "But the means — the method — the power——"

"These are always available for one who seeks them with the fixed purpose of making use thereof:"—and Lady Saxondale, as she spoke, drew her chair a little nearer to that in which Staunton was seated; while her voice became more mysteriously subdued and her manner more impressive.

"I do not understand you," said Harold: "what can I do? how can I act?"

"What can you do? how can you act?" echoed Lady Saxondale, as if in astonishment at the puerility of the questions. "Does your own position suggest nothing? Look at it—examine it well: what is it? You are totally dependent upon an uncle who has recently married the mother of his two illegitimate children. Think you that he cares not more for those children than for *you*, whom he regards as a scapegrace nephew? and will he not therefore do his best to keep his title and estates within the sphere of his own family, and away from you?"

"But how can he?" asked Staunton, quivering with suspense: for the fear was uppermost in his mind, although he thus seemed by his words to doubt the possibility of its realization. "The title goes to his legal heir—and the estates, which are entailed, follow in the same course. I am that legal heir."

"Yes—at present," answered Lady Saxondale: "but how long may you remain so?"

"The wife whom he has married, is forty-six years of age," observed Staunton; "and it would be ridiculous to suppose that he can entertain the hope of her presenting him with an heir."

"Not so ridiculous as you seem to think," rejoined the wily and astute Lady Saxondale. "There have been cases in which women have become mothers at that age—and even three or four years later: and therefore experience and surgical evidence are not against the eventuality—but in favour of it."

"Yes: but the chance is so remote—so excessively remote!"

"Do not argue thus," interrupted Lady Saxondale: "it is the height of folly on your part—because what is possible to happen, *may* happen: or, at all events, upon that plea may it be *done*."

"Still I do not understand you," interjected Staunton: and the quivering of his entire frame was as visible as the paleness with which dire apprehension had painted his cheeks.

"You have two chances against you," responded her ladyship; "and you are an idiot if you leave anything to chance."

"But those chances?"

"One is that the newly-married Marchioness of Eagledean may possibly become a mother: the other is that a supposititious child may be presented to the world as her own, and as the heir of Eagledean. Such things *have* been done——"

But here her ladyship suddenly stopped short, and with a species of recoil from the words she had just uttered.

"Yes—by heaven! it might be done," ejaculated Staunton: "it might be done!" he repeated, starting up from his seat in a paroxysm of torturing nervousness.

"And think you not, then, that it *will* be done?" asked Lady Saxondale. "Has not your uncle every possible interest to exclude you at his death from the title and estates of Eagledean, and to keep them in his own immediate family? His *illegitimate* children could not fail to be benefitted by the circumstance that one whom they would regard as their *legitimate* brother, has the heritage of Eagledean in the perspective."

"True—most true—*too* true!" ejaculated Lord Harold Staunton. "I shall be robbed of my inheritance—I shall become a beggar and a pauper on the face of the earth: unless——"

"Yes—unless you take a prompt and bold part," rejoined Lady Saxondale. "Idiot that you have been, thus to lull yourself into even a moment's security! I presume that your uncle has sent you abroad, no doubt with the intention of keeping you for a length of time upon the Continent, in order that he may carry on his own machinations. Pray did he introduce you to this wife of his before you left England."

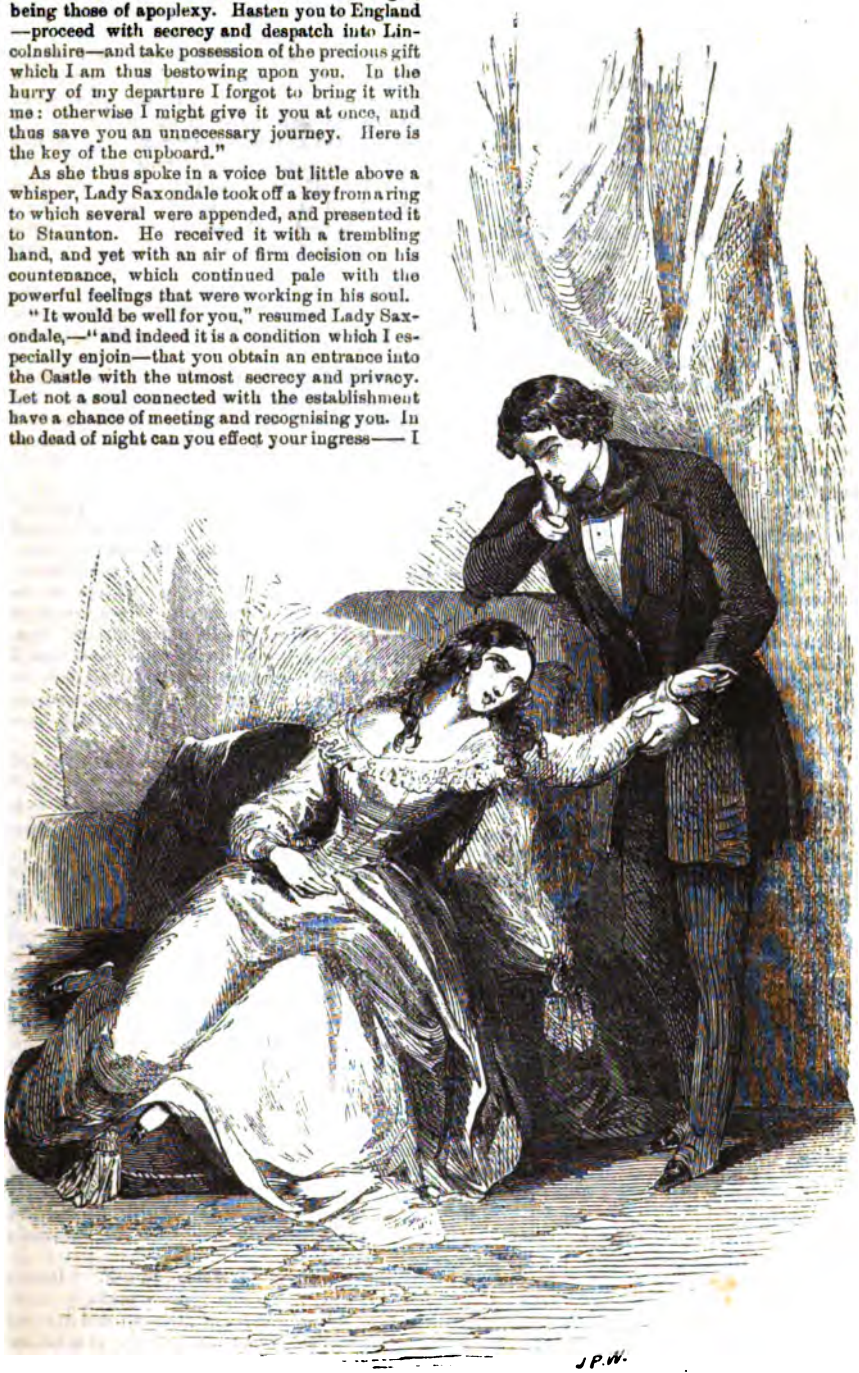
"No—he despatched me to the Continent at once. But I will endure his tyranny and risk his treachery no longer," continued the young nobleman, speaking with bitter vehemence. "You have aroused a spirit within me which will never rest until——"

"Until you have cleared from your path the only obstacle to the acquisition of the title and estates of Eagledean?"—and Lady Saxondale again bent upon him a look which full well expressed her terrible meaning. "And now," she continued, "that I have succeeded in arousing this spirit within you, I will furnish you with the means of carrying out your views effectively. Listen with attention. In a cupboard in my own bed-chamber at Saxondale Castle there is a phial enclosed in a sealed packet. This phial contains a poison so deadly that one drop of it

placed upon the tongue will produce instantaneous death,—the indications which are slight, being those of apoplexy. Hasten you to England —proceed with secrecy and despatch into Lincolnshire—and take possession of the precious gift which I am thus bestowing upon you. In the hurry of my departure I forgot to bring it with me: otherwise I might give it you at once, and thus save you an unnecessary journey. Here is the key of the cupboard."

As she thus spoke in a voice but little above a whisper, Lady Saxondale took off a key from a ring to which several were appended, and presented it to Staunton. He received it with a trembling hand, and yet with an air of firm decision on his countenance, which continued pale with the powerful feelings that were working in his soul.

"It would be well for you," resumed Lady Saxondale,—"and indeed it is a condition which I especially enjoin—that you obtain an entrance into the Castle with the utmost secrecy and privacy. Let not a soul connected with the establishment have a chance of meeting and recognising you. In the dead of night can you effect your ingress—— I



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need not tell you by what means:"—and again she bent upon him a look of peculiar significancy.

"No, no—it is not necessary," he responded with nervous quickness: "and you need not fear that I shall be guilty of imprudence or indiscretion. For the counsel you have given me and the succour you are now lending me, my gratitude is your's. But have you nothing more to suggest? Your imagination is of a fertility to which mine own cannot pretend——"

"I understand you," interrupted Lady Saxondale: "it is not sufficient that I should place the weapon in your hand: but I must also teach you how to use it."

"Yes," rejoined Staunton: "for how can I introduce myself secretly and stealthily into my uncle's house? how can I obtain access to his chamber?"

"And even at the last moment your courage might fail you," observed Lady Saxondale. "Now, listen with attention once more. I happen to know —no matter how—that in the chapel at Saxondale Castle you may, if you choose, meet a certain person whom you will find a ready and willing instrument to serve your purpose. He is a man who for the sake of gold will hesitate at no crime which the human imagination can suggest, or of which human nature is capable. To him you may entrust the phial of which I have already told you how to possess yourself;—and rest assured that when he learns how he is to use it, he will neither hesitate nor quail. Give him not his reward until the work is done: but promise him five hundred pounds for the accomplishment of the deed—and he will afterwards leave England, so that you need not fear to be troubled by his importunities for the future."

"And who is this person that can render such valuable aid?" inquired Lord Harold, who had listened with trembling eagerness to the dark and terrible instructions which had just been given him.

"He answers to the name of Chiffin," responded her ladyship.

"Chiffin?" ejaculated Staunton, instantaneously struck with the name. "What! he of whom the newspapers sometime since spoke as the suspected murderer of a publican and his wife in a place called Agar Town? Ah! and now that I bethink me, my uncle mentioned this same individual to me as one whom you had employed——"

"You need not say any more," interrupted Lady Saxondale, with cold calmness: "I see that your uncle has been explicit enough in respect to *my* proceedings. Yes—it is perfectly true that he and William Deveril—both hated names, I can assure you—would have perished a few weeks ago, had it not been for some accident the particulars of which I have not learnt, but which in some way or another frustrated Chiffin's plan. But doubtless you are sufficiently acquainted with this individual's character, to be well aware that he is a fitting instrument for your purpose."

"None could serve me better," responded Harold. "A man who is already in fear of the law's vengeance, and who perhaps awaits but the means for enabling him to leave the country, is the best instrument I could obtain. But now, before I express my thanks for all this additional information you have given me," continued Staunton, "let us understand each other. What will *you* seek at my hands if I succeed in making myself Marquis of Eagledean?"

"Nothing," replied Lady Saxondale. "Can you not comprehend that I have a bitter vengeance to wreak upon this uncle of yours—and that I shall be satisfied in thus accomplishing the end through you? As for thanks, I need them not. But one more word of advice will I proffer:—which is, that you call to your aid all possible circumspection and prudence, wariness and caution; for it is a bold stroke that you are playing, though one well worth the venture. Ah! and there is yet something else that I may do for you. Doubtless your uncle has not been too munificent in the pecuniary means which he has placed at your disposal?—and you will require ample funds in the execution of your projects. Permit me to be your banker: it is not the first time."

Thus speaking, Lady Saxondale drew forth her purse, and presented Lord Harold Staunton with two English Bank-notes for five hundred pounds each.

"You said that you would accept no thanks, Harriet," he observed, as he received the gift: "but nevertheless do I proffer them. And now one word more. Where can I find you—or where can I communicate with you—if the necessity should arise?"

"I know not—I can name no address at present," answered Lady Saxondale. "Juliana and myself have for the last few weeks been living in retirement at some village fifty or sixty miles hence; but being recognised by English visitors, we resolved on changing our quarters. We are now on our way to Germany. In a few months' time, perhaps, we may return to England: or at least I shall—and then it may be that I shall have to congratulate you on bearing the title and possessing the estates of Eagledean. Our interview has been long enough. Farewell, Harold."

"Farewell, Harriet. What! not one embrace?"

"Give not way to a renewal of past follies," responded Lady Saxondale, coldly drawing back from the overtures of the young nobleman. "Farewell."

She beckoned him in a peremptory manner to leave the apartment: and he did so. On descending the stairs, he was informed by the waiter that his dinner was served up; and he accordingly repaired to the room in which the table was spread. But he had little appetite for the viands with which the board was covered: all his thoughts and all his senses, so to speak, were engrossed in the project which the fiendish ingenuity of his evil genius had put into his head. Indeed, so completely was he absorbed in the contemplation thereof, and in the prospect of soon inheriting the immense wealth of his uncle, that he even lost sight of his meeting with Lord Saxondale; and it was not until after her ladyship and Juliana had taken their departure from the hotel, that he again recollected the incident, and was thus reminded that he had not breathed a syllable concerning it to Edmund's mother.

"But no matter," he said to himself. "Doubtless Lady Saxondale has become perfectly indifferent to the proceedings of her son; and if he be an infatuated fool, let him remain so. It is not for me to take any trouble in the matter."

CHAPTER CXIX.

EDMUND AND THE BARONESS.

MEANWHILE Lord Saxondale and the Baroness de Charlemont were continuing their way towards Calais; and travelling all night, they reached that town at an early hour in the morning. Having breakfasted at an hotel, they embarked on board one of the steam-packets plying between Calais and Dover: and by mid-day reached the latter town. They at once proceeded to the *Ship Hotel*, the principal one at Dover; and while luncheon was getting in readiness, the Baroness ascended to a chamber with her maid, to amend her toilet. Lord Saxondale gave his orders to the waiter in respect to the repast; and was making some inquiries concerning the trains to London,—when, as the room door stood open, he heard the name of the Baroness mentioned by an unknown voice on the landing outside.

"No, really—is it she, though?" said another voice equally unknown to Lord Saxondale.

"Yes—I tell you again that she is none other than Madame de Charlemont, who——"

"Hush! we shall be overheard."

Then the voices ceased; and Saxondale's ears caught the sounds of two persons' footsteps descending the stairs.

The waiter, who was referring to a *Railway Guide* at the instant, did not notice that Edmund was paying any particular attention to what was being said on the landing; and most probably the man did not himself catch those observations. But when he had left the room, Saxondale said to himself, "My beloved Adelaide"—for that was the Christian name of the Baroness de Charlemont—"seems to create a sensation wherever she appears. It is no doubt her extraordinary beauty which thus makes her remarked."

But still there was something very much like a slight suspicion and vague misgiving floating in Saxondale's mind, like a dim and scarcely perceptible gossamer wreath in the twilight of evening; and infatuated though he were—frivolous and rash though he also was in obeying the impulse of his passions and giving way to the slightest whims of his instincts—he could not help thinking that it would have been well to know something more relative to the Baroness, ere he so precipitately made her an offer of his hand. Had she indeed given him the true version of the reasons for which she was slighted and shunned at the ball at the Odeon Theatre? could that treatment have arisen from the jealousy of the ladies and the vindictive disappointment of her would-be admirers of the other sex? The story, though so implicitly believed by Edmund when he first heard it, now struck him as somewhat extraordinary. If only a portion of the ladies—the younger ones, for instance—had neglected her for such a cause,—and only some portion of the gentlemen,—the tale would have been more feasible: but the shunning of her was so universal at the time—he himself constituting the only exception; for even the very stewards whose duty and office it was to be civil and pay attention to every one at such an assemblage, proffered not the slightest courtesy to the Baroness de Charlemont! But on the other hand, what could there possibly be against her? If a depraved character, and of notoriously damaged reputation, would she have had the audacity to present herself at that assemblage at all? and would not the stewards have given her a hint to retire? She could not be an adventuress: for that she *was* the Baroness de Charlemont was evident enough: the two strangers whose remarks had ere now caught his ears, corroborated that fact. She was evidently rich; for her mansion in Paris was splendid—her equipage appropriately handsome—and moreover, she had not only offered him a sum of money, but on happening to open her writing-desk at the hotel in Calais where they breakfasted, she had displayed a large quantity of notes and gold. What, then, could there be against her? Nothing—assuredly nothing!

All these reflections swept through the mind of Lord Saxondale in a much less space of time than it has taken us to record them; and scarcely had he arrived at the conclusion that the dim and vague suspicions which had begun to float in his mind were utterly unfounded, when she made her appearance in another toilet. Her exquisite beauty, which was really of transcending splendour, at once had the effect of banishing even the memory of those suspicions from the young nobleman's mind; and under the empire of her brilliant charms and softly sensuous smiles, he became all confidence and trustfulness once more.

When luncheon was over, Edmund was informed by one of the waiters that as there was some little difficulty in clearing the luggage at the Custom House, it would be necessary for him to proceed thither and make some formal declaration. He accordingly repaired to the Custom House; and was soon in the midst of the bustling crowd of government officials, hotel commissioners and waiters, and impatient travellers, in the room where all the luggage that had arrived in the steam-packet, was being inspected. He could not immediately obtain the attention of the proper officer to whom he had to address himself: and he therefore stood apart until his turn should come. Near the spot where he thus stationed himself, there was a group of young English gentlemen, whom he recognised to have been on board the packet; and he heard one of them say in a quick but subdued voice, "There! that's Lord Saxondale! It's he who was with the Baroness de Charlemont."

"Hush! he will overhear you," said another; and the group, in order to continue the conversation, moved a little farther off, and passed behind an immense pile of bales of goods; so that they were now hidden from Edmund's view.

Again did all those vague and indistinct suspicions spring up in Edmund's mind; and he instinctively drew close towards the pile of goods, so that he might be enabled to hear what was passing on the other side.

"But what did she do it for?" asked one of the young men.

"No one knows," replied another. "It's one of those things that baffle all conjecture."

"I dare say there was a lover at the bottom of it."

"Nothing of the sort! I never heard the Baroness de Charlemont's chastity called in question. On the contrary, it is well known that though her husband was so old and ugly, and so mutilated in the

wars, she never indulged her fancies elsewhere. At least, I mean that this is as well known as such things can be;—and at all events *this* at least is notorious—that she indignantly rejected anything in the shape of an overture, even on the part of the handsomest and best-born men of France."

"Then what *could* have been the motive?"

"How ridiculous to persevere in asking a question which, I tell you, no one can answer! But there's my turn to pass my luggage!"

Here the conversation terminated; and the group breaking up, Saxondale hastily stepped away from the spot where he had overheard the above fragments of their discourse. Almost immediately afterwards he was called to attend to the business which had brought him thither: it was only some trivial formality, which need not here be mentioned, and which was speedily fulfilled. The little matter being thus terminated, he began to retrace his way towards the hotel. Pondering upon all that he had overheard, he felt convinced that there *was* some mystery attached to his charming Baroness;—and that it was sufficient to engross the interest of those who knew anything about her, was likewise sufficiently plain. But what could it be? No eulogy could be higher than that which he had heard so spontaneously proclaimed in respect to her chastity; and to a certain extent it corroborated her own statement, that she had indignantly refused many gallant overtures. Consequently, on that point where a lover is most likely to be susceptible, there was no imputation against the Baroness de Charlemont. But still recurred the question—what was it that had thrown such a mystic interest and romantic haze about her name? Something had been alluded to in which the "motive" was discussed: what could that something be? It would appear that she must have done something which was unaccountable: but surely it could be naught of a disgraceful or degrading character: for if so, how could she have found her way into the midst of that brilliant assemblage at the Odeon Theatre? True enough was it that she was left in isolation there: but yet no one had ventured to make a movement for her expulsion. Altogether it was bewildering; and though Saxondale could not help thus reflecting upon the matter, it ceased to give him much uneasiness—if any at all—after the assurance he had gathered that her reputation as a woman was spotless. It was now therefore a sentiment of curiosity more than anything else, which inspired his reflections and blended itself with the infatuated passion he experienced towards her.

As he ascended the staircase of the hotel, he thought to himself that he would tell the Baroness very candidly all he had heard, and leave her to explain it. For he now recollected that on the previous day, Lord Harold, on hearing her name mentioned, had repeated it in a manner which had made but little impression on him at the time, but which now he had no difficulty in attributing to the same degree of mysterious interest which he had since seen manifested in respect to the Baroness de Charlemont. He therefore entered the room where he had left her, with the intention of saying something on the subject: but when he beheld her half-reclining upon a low ottoman, in a position most voluptuously charming, his ideas were once again all turned into another channel.

Wearied with travelling a whole day and night—and with the voyage from Calais to Dover in addition—the Baroness, throwing herself on that ottoman in the handsomely furnished room of the hotel, had sunk into a state of dreamy repose—that half-slumber from which a refreshing and soothing sensation is derived, but in which the mind does not altogether lose its consciousness. Thus, when Edmund entered the apartment, she opened her eyes languidly, and extended her hand to greet him. He hastened towards her—he caught that hand, so white, so warm, so plump—he bent down, and imprinted kisses on her cheeks: then he remained standing near the pile of cushions on which her head reclined, and which sustained her splendid form in a half-sitting position;—and as she smiled up at him, he surveyed her with all the rapture of that passion wherewith she had inspired him. There seemed to be an unstudied air of softly sensuous languor pervading her entire form, and which, without the slightest immodesty, was ineffably provocative. Her tresses and ringlets lay like dark gold about her throat and on her ivory shoulders: her dress, not too low for decency, revealed a sufficiency of the bust to enable the imagination to complete the picture of the rounded and glowing contours of which the eye caught a portion: the folds of her drapery developed while concealing the shapeliness of her well-formed limbs,—defining their sweeping length and rich but symmetrical modelling; while the exquisitely shaped feet peered from beneath the skirt of the garment. And as Edmund, after running his eyes over that superb figure, rested them again upon the countenance, he knew not which feature to admire the most,—the large blue eyes appearing to swim in a sea of languor, and full of melting tenderness—the rich red lips apart, revealing the pearly teeth—or the cheeks where the vermeil of the peach was shaded delicately off until it merged into the lily whiteness of the general complexion. Perhaps, for the first time in his life, Saxondale felt a slight mingling of the sentiment together with the grosser and more sensual feelings with which the grand and brilliant beauty of the Baroness de Charlemont had inspired him. Indeed, he might almost be said to be downright in love,—not a love that merely sought animal gratification—but that which is of a more refined quality. Could he therefore—even if he now remembered the circumstance—ask a single question relative to aught which might perchance conjure up some unpleasant memory in the mind of this magnificent creature? But he had ceased to think of it altogether: he was lost—bewildered—intoxicated, in the strength of his passion.

For two hours did they converse upon the rapturous topic of love, their immediate plans, and their future prospects. The Baroness possessed a beautifully melodious voice; and when it wove the language of love in blended tones of silvery softness and flute-like mellowness, permeated with the limpid clearness of the crystal streamlet's flow, it sounded like the music of paradise to the ears of her admirer. He hung upon her words with an increasing fondness, of that sentimental quality which had begun to entwine itself with his more sensual longings; and thus all the greater was the hold which the Baroness obtained on his heart. And she told him how she had liked him the very first moment she

beheld him—and that this was not on the night of the ball, but a few days previously, when she was riding in her carriage in the Champs Elysées, and had seen him in the same equipage with Lord and Lady Petersfield. It was thus, she went on to observe, that she was led to inquire of one of her domestics whom that equipage contained: and the servant, happening to know, was enabled to inform her. And she proceeded to state how much she was rejoiced, and how infinite was the secret satisfaction she experienced, when finding herself isolated at the ball, he who had already struck her fancy on a previous occasion, was *then* the very one—and the only one—to accost her; and she hesitated not to avow that the feeling of gratitude with which he had thus inspired her, was of that deep and tender nature that it required but a little more kindness to make it expand into love. It was thus that she accounted for the exceeding rapid growth of the sentiment which had led her, after so brief an acquaintance, to accept his overtures and consent to become his wife.

To all these things did Edmund listen with rapturous attention; and he thought himself supremely happy in having won the love of a woman whose beauty was so transcending, and whose voice sank down like delicious harmony into his soul. When the hour for departure came, and he found himself seated by her side in the railway-carriage, he bitterly regretted the presence of the maid, who was thus a constraint upon them, and prevented the discourse from being continued in a similarly captivating strain. For the maid, though a Frenchwoman, understood English perfectly; and the Baroness chose to be very circumspect in her presence. Nevertheless the discourse, though turning on general matters, was pleasant enough; and as Madame de Charlemont possessed great conversational powers, —characterised, too, by a certain brilliancy of wit which savoured rather of the land in which marriage had naturalised her, than of her own native England, —she proved the most agreeable of companions. Thus the time slipped away rapidly enough; and London was reached ere Saxondale thought that half the journey had been completed.

On arriving in the metropolis, the Baroness and her maid proceeded to a West End hotel, according to previous arrangement; and Lord Saxondale, taking an affectionate leave of her, repaired with his valet to the mansion in Park Lane. Though his mother had gone abroad, the establishment was maintained there upon the same footing as ever; and thus everything was ready for Lord Saxondale's reception. Intoxicated with happiness, he could not forget his habit of sustaining his natural spirits, when excited, by means of artificial stimulant: and having discussed the larger portion of a bottle of champagne, he retired to rest to dream of the Baroness de Charlemont.

In the morning, when his valet made his appearance to assist him in the process of the toilet, the idea suddenly struck Lord Saxondale that it was probable he might know something more than himself concerning the mystery which evidently invested the object of his adoration: and he saw no harm in endeavouring to elicit such particulars, should the man be enabled to afford them.

"Well," he said, in an off-hand conversational manner, "I suppose you have guessed by this time that you are likely to have a mistress as well as a master?"

"Yes, my lord," responded the valet: "I certainly entertained that impression."

"I don't usually condescend to consult my inferiors on such subjects," continued Edmund, with his characteristic aristocratic superciliousness; "but as I know your fidelity and attachment, I don't mind asking you whether you think that the lady is one who will do honour to the family into which she is about to enter, and equal honour to my good taste?"

"Yes, my lord—assuredly, my lord," answered the valet, who knew Edmund's disposition well enough to be inclined to pander to his inclinations in any way. "Your lordship could not do otherwise than display the most exquisite taste."

"Well, I think I am rather up to the mark in that way," observed Edmund, surveying himself in the mirror. "By the bye, that maid of her ladyship's seems a very decent body. Of course you and she have had some little chat together?—and no doubt she has told you many little things connected with her ladyship——I mean such little traits and points of history which of course ooze out in familiar conversation?"

"We have not had much opportunity, my lord, for such discourse," answered the valet; "for the maid travelled inside the chaise, you know, my lord, all the way to Calais—and was likewise in the same carriage with you, my lord, and her ladyship on the railway."

"Nevertheless, you *must* have had some little time to chat—on board the packet, for instance—and when taking your meals together at the hotels."

"Oh! yes, my lord," rejoined the valet.

"Well, then, what did you talk about?" continued Saxondale, inwardly anathematising his domestic for not coming to the point at once. "You see—there is no disguising the fact—I know very little of her ladyship——I mean her previous history, and so forth——"

"It seems, my lord, that her ladyship has had a deal of trouble."

"Ah, indeed! In what way?"

"I don't exactly know, my lord: but her maid frequently alluded to something of the sort. Thus, for instance, she said that her ladyship went out into society for the first time since her trouble, the other night when your lordship met her——at the theatre I believe it was?"

"Just so. But what trouble is this, I wonder? I am really very sorry to think that so charming a creature could have undergone much trouble. Yet what a fool I am. I understand what it means! The maid alluded to the Baron de Charlemont's death."

"Very likely, my lord. But I think that her ladyship must have experienced some other sad affliction: for I remember hearing the maid saying that her mistress could have resigned herself to that loss, if it hadn't been for what followed."

"And what did follow?" inquired Saxondale.

"Ah! that I don't know, my lord. Her ladyship's maid never said any more to the purpose; and at first I did not like to seem impertinent and ask questions. Afterwards, when I might have ventured an inquiry, something always happened to put an end to the discourse."

"Ah, well!" observed Edmund, seeing that his valet was but little wiser than himself in the matter: "her ladyship will of course confide to me all her grievances—and it will be my duty as well as pleasure to console them. Nevertheless, you might go to the hotel presently to pay a friendly visit to the maid, and just try to draw her out a bit. Not, you know, that I have any curiosity in the affair: for I have every assurance that her ladyship is as virtuous and as good as she is beautiful and accomplished. But still, if you *could* find out what her troubles have been, it would be more easy for me to administer the proper consolation. And therefore, all things considered, you can do this—and remain at the hotel till I call. Now, between you and me, I am going to get a special license; and the marriage shall take place to-day——"

"To-day, my lord?" exclaimed the valet, startled somewhat out of his wonted composure by the announcement of this precipitation: but instantaneously recovering himself, he observed, "Of course, my lord—it is quite natural—and in your lordship's position, there is no need to wait."

"To be sure not—no need at all. I am my own master—or at least I mean to show my guardians that I am; and therefore it is not likely I shall postpone the consummation of my happiness. By the bye, about the bridemaids—they are indispensable I suppose? and some one to give the bride away too—eh?"

"Not absolutely indispensable, my lord," suggested the valet. "At St. George's, Hanover Square, the clerk is accustomed to give the bride away; and bridemaids are not needed, unless one likes. If it were otherwise, a great many marriages that are hurried, would not take place at all."

"True," observed Saxondale. "It would entail a great deal of bother and trouble upon me to go ferreting out a couple of bridemaids: and they are not, as you say, of the slightest use. So I will just pen a note to the Baroness to tell her that for several reasons the ceremony must take place as privately as possible——I will say that Marlow and Malton, the lawyers, have got scent of it——and I will request her to be in readiness by twelve o'clock. I can get the license, and go and see the parson, and everything in the meantime. Besides, if I send you with this note, it will be an excuse for you to call at the hotel; and you can get into conversation with the maid. Don't forget that part of the business."

"No, my lord," answered the valet.

Edmund then sat down, and wrote a brief but tender billet to the Baroness,—immediately despatching it by his valet to the hotel.

We need not linger in detail upon this portion of our narrative. Let us therefore hasten to state that it was about half-past eleven o'clock when Lord Saxondale alighted from his private carriage—or rather his mother's—at the door of the hotel just alluded to; and he was somewhat disappointed at not finding his valet in readiness to receive him. He certainly wished to exchange a few words with the domestic, and ascertain what particular circumstance it was to which such mysterious allusion had been made, and which he had no doubt was the *one* special secret he had so much longed to fathom. But the valet was not there: at least he did not make his appearance;—and Saxondale did not choose to keep the Baroness waiting while he instituted inquiries after his servant. He accordingly followed the waiter who was in readiness to escort him to the sitting-room occupied by Madame de Charlemont; and in a few moments he was in that lady's presence. The waiter retired: they were now alone together;—and immediately forgetting all his anxiety to learn the particular secret above referred to, Edmund hastened to fold his Adelaide in his arms.

Warm and fervid was the embrace; and when he had leisure to gaze upon her, he thought that she appeared more gloriously handsome than he had yet seen her. She was elegantly dressed, in an apparel which though not actually a wedding costume, was nevertheless sufficiently appropriate for a nuptial ceremony of a private character, and for which no elaborate preparations had been made. Indeed, her toilet was not merely elegant, but was also characterised by the most graceful simplicity; and it set off her charms to the fullest advantage. The flutter of her heart had heightened the colour upon her cheeks: there was a deeper tenderness in the eyes, which made her look sweetly bewitching; and Saxondale again experienced all the empire of her enchanting loveliness. She had received his note—she consented to the arrangements suggested therein—she believed his tale that the attorneys had caught an inkling of what was going on—and she was in the flutter of suspense lest aught should occur to interrupt the ceremony. But he had the special license in his pocket—the clergyman had been spoken to—and he assured her that when they reached the church, everything would be in readiness.

Another embrace—and he conducted her down stairs,—her maid, who was likewise well and tastefully dressed, accompanying them. Again did Saxondale—recollecting the mission he had entrusted to his valet—look around for this individual: but he was not to be seen. For a moment he felt annoyed—and was even inclined to tarry and make inquiries after the man: but as he lingered for an instant, the Baroness threw upon him a look replete with so much indescribable tenderness—and she seemed so miraculously beautiful as she thus bent her regards upon him—that all his thoughts became once more suddenly engrossed by her; and he hastened to assist her into the carriage.

In ten minutes the equipage rolled up to the door of St. George's Church, Hanover Square. Edmund assisted the Baroness to alight,—and conducted her into that fashionable matrimonial temple,—the maid following at a short distance. The clergyman and the clerk were punctual in attendance: and without delay did the ceremony commence. No doubt the Baroness dreaded lest Edmund's guardians should suddenly make their appearance: for the colour went and came in frequent transitions upon her countenance—and as the bridegroom knelt by her side, he could perceive by the undulating movements of her dress, that her bosom was heaving and falling with quick palpitations. He however had no fear of the kind: for he felt well assured that Marlow and Malton could know nothing of what was going on—and Petersfield, even if he had already arrived in London, would not have the slightest idea where to look for them at that particular moment. And the ceremony *did* proceed

without interruption: it was accomplished—and the Baroness de Charlemont became Lady Saxondale. Thus all in an instant was the appellation of *Dowager* affixed to the title of that other Lady Saxondale who was journeying with her daughter upon the Continent, and who little suspected what was going on in London at the time.

Yes—the ceremony was over; and, as usual, the bride and bridegroom repaired to the vestry while the clergyman registered the marriage and furnished the proper certificate. The Baroness, who had been much excited by her apprehensions and other feelings throughout the morning, sat down,—Edmund standing near, and bending over her to whisper words of love and tenderness in her ear. While thus engaged, he caught sight—through the vestry door, which stood half open—of his valet, who was now loitering just outside the threshold.

"Pardon my absence for a few moments," whispered Saxondale to his bride:—"I wish to give some instructions to my domestic. The servants generally, at the house, do not know what is taking place; and I will send him on at once to make the announcement—so that you may be spared some little awkwardness and confusion on reaching Park Lane."

The bride, by means of a tender and endearing look, expressed her gratitude for this consideration on her husband's part; and he stepped out of the vestry. Immediately on joining his valet, it struck Edmund that there was something peculiar in the man's look; and if he did not feel exactly frightened, he nevertheless experienced a sudden sensation of suspense which was somewhat painful.

"Why did you not meet me at the hotel, as I ordered you?" he asked, drawing the valet aside to a little distance from the open door of the vestry.

"I quite mistook your lordship," was the response. "I humbly ask pardon—but I really thought your lordship's instructions were that I was to join your lordship in Park Lane after I had been to the hotel."

"No such thing!" promptly ejaculated the bridegroom. "However, it was a mistake, and can't be helped. The ceremony is over: and——and——" he was about to say "I am the happiest of men:" but he could not get the words out of his lips, for he saw that his valet's countenance was becoming still more peculiar in its expression, and indeed was clouded with a depth of gloom: so he hurriedly asked, "Well, have you anything to tell me?"

"No, my lord—nothing——nothing particular——no, nothing:"—and the valet stammered, looking at the same time so strange that Saxondale was seized with a vague and unknown terror, and might have been knocked down with a straw.

"Yes—but I know that you *have* something to tell me," he exclaimed nervously, but in a subdued tone. "Come—out with it! Have you been talking to the maid?"

"Yes, my lord—a little. Your lordship commanded me to do so."

"To be sure! Why don't you proceed?" demanded Edmund, his countenance white and his limbs trembling with apprehension. "Now tell me—is there anything the matter?——I see there is!——have I made a fool of myself?——don't you perceive that suspense is killing me? Speak, I say!"

"Well, my lord—since you order me,"—and the valet stammered more and more, and likewise became more and more confused,—"it is my duty to tell your lordship that——that——"

"That what?"—and Saxondale felt as if he could strike his domestic a savage blow for thus tantalizing him. "What is it your duty to tell me? what have you learnt?"

"That the Baroness——her ladyship——Lady Saxondale, that now is, I mean——"

"Well, well?"

"Was tried, my lord——"

"Tried?" echoed Edmund: and his brain appeared to whirl.

"Yes, my lord——I am very sorry to have such bad news—but her ladyship was tried——She was acquitted however?" quickly ejaculated the valet, as if catching at this circumstance as a great consolation.

"Tried and acquitted?" repeated Saxondale, who felt as if the church was all spinning round and round.

"Yes, my lord——unfortunately her ladyship was tried——"

"What for? what for?"

"The——the——murder of her husband!"

CHAPTER CXX.

SAXONDALE CASTLE AGAIN.

We must now transport the attention of our readers to Saxondale Castle. It was about eleven o'clock at night—four days after those incidents which occurred at the hotel at Beauvais—and Chiffin the Cannibal was smoking his pipe in the cloister leading out of the chapel. No candle was burning there; for that would be dangerous, because calculated to attract attention to the circumstance: but the night was transcendingly clear and beautiful, and the moon was pouring its argentine lustre through the narrow arched windows of that cloister. The reader will remember that this place was described in the opening chapter of our narrative, as containing several tombs and monuments, and in the midst a colossal figure of black marble, representing a warrior in complete armour, with his visor closed. The moonbeams fell upon this giant-statue, at the foot of which Chiffin the Cannibal was seated. There it stood—that sculptured shape—its left hand upon the hip—its right arm extended as if menacingly pointed towards the door communicating with the chapel, and which stood open. It was a strange spectacle—had any one been there to view it,—that ferocious-looking ruffian seated on the pedestal which supported the colossal image that towered above him; and as the silver lustre of the moon threw out this group of marble and man into strong relief, there was a singular blending of effects produced by the awe-imposing solemnity of the former and the savage grimness of the latter.

Chiffin wore that same suit of respectable broadcloth apparel which had been lent him by the landlord of the boosing-ken in Bethnal Green. Some weeks had elapsed since the murder in Agar Town,—some weeks therefore since we beheld him a wandering fugitive, well-nigh goaded to desperation by the loss of the money of which Tony Wil-

kins plundered him. It will be remembered that by a robbery committed on the highway, he obtained some little money—but not enough to enable him to leave the kingdom. He had therefore put into execution his original design of taking up his quarters in Saxondale Castle. To obtain ingress to the uninhabited portion of the building, was by no means difficult: but as he had entered by one of the tapestry-chambers—that very one in which Lady Saxondale and Juliana had attempted self-destruction, and the door thereof had been locked—he was compelled to force it open in order to make his way to the chapel and the place of tombs, which he considered to be the safest abiding-place. For he concluded that the domestics would sometimes visit the tapestry-chambers for the purpose of keeping them in order: whereas the same care was not needed by the old marbles in the cloister. In the middle of the night he was accustomed to make his way to the larder in the other wing of the building, and help himself to such provender as he needed,—but taking care to leave as few traces of such a visit as possible. In this respect he might have carried on the same game for a considerable period without the chance of detection; inasmuch as where there was a large number of domestics, there was little chance of the food being missed, especially as the larder was always well supplied.

He had no difficulty in gathering, from a variety of circumstances, that Lady Saxondale was not at the Castle; and he therefore supposed that she must be in London: for as a matter of course he had not the slightest idea that she had gone abroad. After a short sojourn at the Castle, he found his position so irksome—felt so miserable and lonely—and was moreover so anxious to get out of the country on account of the active search which he felt convinced must be making after him, that he resolved to pen a letter to Lady Saxondale and demand pecuniary succour. Writing materials he easily obtained by a visit to the library at dead of night; and having written his letter, addressing it to her ladyship in Park Lane, he stole out of the Castle, walked to the nearest village, and consigned it to the local post-office. This being done, he made his way back to his quarters in the Castle; and that was the only occasion on which he ventured out since his arrival there. Having written in urgent and positive terms, he expected that Lady Saxondale would come down into Lincolnshire expressly to afford him the succour he required: for by no other means could the transaction be accomplished. Day after day however passed—night after night went by—and his solitude in the chapel and the cloister continued unbroken by the appearance of her ladyship. And no wonder: for she was on the Continent;—and though his letter had been forwarded to her, along with others from England, she had not the slightest notion of returning expressly to comply with his demand. She was well aware that he dared not proclaim to the world anything he knew concerning her: for that would be tantamount to a voluntary surrender of himself into the hands of justice. As for his being secreted in the Castle—this circumstance troubled her but little: for even if he should take it into his head to help himself to such portable articles as might strike his predatory fancy, the loss would be comparatively insignificant, and less than the amount in money which she would have to give him if she paid attention to his letter. But ere continuing the thread of our narrative, we should remark that it was from this letter that Lady Saxondale was enabled to inform Lord Harold Staunton of the fact that he would meet in the chapel at Saxondale Castle so fitting an instrument for the murderous project which she herself had suggested.

Some weeks, then, had elapsed since Chiffin the Cannibal took up his quarters at the Castle; and as yet the presence of any such intruder remained unsuspected by the servants. If the cook, on descending in the morning, happened to observe that some joint or cold pie had been encroached upon in the larder after she had closed the premises over-night ere retiring to rest, she naturally concluded that one of her fellow-servants, feeling hungry, had paid the provender a visit when she herself had gone to bed: and thus nothing was said upon the subject. On one occasion only, during that interval of a few weeks, did the servants repair to the tapestry-rooms to dust and air them; and then the circumstance of the door of one having been forced open, struck them as singular, but led to no search elsewhere—for the impression was strong with the household, ever since the night of the attempted self-destruction by Lady Saxondale and her daughter, that the western side of the Castle was haunted by a mischievous spirit. Thus Chiffin the Cannibal had hitherto remained in perfect security.

Now let us return to that particular night on which we behold him seated at the foot of that colossal statue, smoking his pipe, and ruminating upon his circumstances. The more than usual grimness of his countenance and sullen ferocity of his looks were a sufficient indication that he was by no means satisfied with the life he was leading. He could not understand how it was that Lady Saxondale did not trouble herself to come down into Lincolnshire and give him the means for getting out of the country. His patience was exhausted; and he was now thinking seriously of making his way to London at all risks, for the purpose of obtaining an interview with her ladyship. Something of this sort he felt that he must do. He could not endure the horrible gloom and solitude of his position any longer: he was moreover becoming vindictively savage against Lady Saxondale herself, for what he considered to be her neglect of him—especially after he was the means of saving her life and that of her daughter when they attempted self-destruction.

It was in the midst of these reflections, and while seated on the pedestal of the black marble statue, that Chiffin thought he heard the sound of a window opening somewhere in the range of building to which the chapel and cloister belonged. He listened with suspended breath; and in a few moments he distinctly heard the sound of the window closing again.

"Who the deuce can this be?" said Chiffin to himself, and not without a certain degree of apprehension. "It looks as if some one was a-coming by just the very same way that I've always been accustomed to take when I've honoured this here Castle with my presence."

While thus musing, he continued to listen attentively; and in a few moments he heard a door opening. The sound of that door he knew well: it

was the one belonging to the tapestry-room by which he was wont to make his entry—the one, in short, which he himself had recently broken open. Some one, then, was approaching. Who could it be?—who but some ill-intentioned person would effect his ingress thus stealthily? But if a robber, Chiffin had nothing to fear: dog eats not dog. What if it were an officer of justice? Ah! that would be quite a different thing; and the Cannibal clutched his club with a firmer grasp and with a more ferocious grimness of look as the thought thus swept through his imagination.

But what course should he adopt? The door of that tapestry-room had opened—footsteps were heard——Ah! and now the door of the chapel itself grated on its hinges. Chiffin's first impulse was to hasten and conceal himself behind one of the tombs: but a second thought altered his determination. If the individual approaching were really an officer of justice, he would not have come alone; nor would he have made his entry in such a manner. Nor was it likely the person was a robber: for if so, it was probable he would have sought an entry into that part of the castle where there was something to steal, and not into this uninhabited portion. Then, who could it be, save and except an emissary from Lady Saxondale—and his letter was about to receive due attention? With this last idea influencing him, Chiffin rose up from his seat on the pedestal of the statue, and advanced along the cloister into the chapel. There, by the faint glimmering light which penetrated more feebly than into the place of tombs, the Cannibal beheld a tall, slender figure, evidently that of a gentleman—but whose countenance was completely concealed by the brims of a large slouching hat. The individual at the same time perceived Chiffin, whose advancing footsteps he had already heard; and a half-subdued expression of satisfaction escaped his lips.

"Your name is Chiffin?" he at once said.

"Well, I don't know that there's the least use in saying it's Smith, or anything else," responded the Cannibal: "therefore, with your leave, I'll introduce myself to you as Mr. Chiffin; and if I don't put *Esquire* to my name, it is that I'm not proud. But whom may you be, sir?"

"I am Lord Harold Staunton," was the answer.

"Then, my lord," said the Cannibal, taking off his hat, "I am your most obedient servant."

"I suppose you can guess who has sent me?" continued the nobleman, now putting back the slouching hat somewhat, in order that he might obtain a better view of the Cannibal's countenance, so far as the feebly glimmering light would permit.

"There's no difficulty about that, my lord," replied the latter. "Lady Saxondale is a very good friend of mine; and I've no doubt she has given you summut that will be very acceptable to me."

"Softly," observed Harold. "It is perfectly true that you may earn a considerable sum of money, if you like; but it will not be paid over to you unless so earnt:"—then as the idea suddenly occurred to Staunton, that Chiffin might make an attack upon him in order to plunder him of whatsoever he might have about his person, he hastened to add, "Nor have I even the money with me now: but it shall be forthcoming."

"Well, this isn't over satisfactory," growled the Cannibal. "Howsomever, let's know what it is her ladyship wants done: and I am not the man to flinch. I like serving the aristocracy: for I must admit that if they are uncommon ready to do queer things, they are equally willing to pay handsome for them."

"Lady Saxondale requires nothing at your hands," answered Staunton, scarcely able to conceal the disgust and loathing he felt for the wretch, whom nevertheless he meant to employ. "It is I myself that have a task for you to undertake."

"Well and good, my lord: nothing like extending one's connexion. But if you just step into this cloister here, we can sit down and talk more at our ease."

"No," replied Harold, who was fully on his guard against any snare as well as sudden treachery: "we can talk well enough where we are. In the first place, let me ask whether you would like to earn five hundred pounds?"

"Ah, that I should!" exclaimed Chiffin. "But it is the price of murder, I'll be bound, by the amount of it!"

"Hush!" said Harold, feeling his blood run cold at the utterance of that dreadful *word*, though he had brought himself to reflect with cool composure upon the *thing* itself.

"There's no fear of being overheard," said Chiffin, —"unless it is by the ghosts of the dead that's buried in them tombs—or by that chap in black marble there. But I've been here a matter of some weeks, and hav'n't found myself troubled. The fact is, my lord, I'm more afraid, under present circumstances, of the living than the dead. But go on. I've told you it likes me well to earn the money; and you can now say what it's for."

"You yourself have already hinted—or more than hinted," returned Staunton. "It is——"

"Murder? Well then, who's the person? and where's it to be done?"

"The place where it is to be done, is a considerable way off," answered Staunton. "No matter who the person is. I will tell you that when we are near the spot itself."

"But I must inform your lordship," observed Chiffin, "that it's rather inconvenient for me to travel much about—particklar in the day time: cos why, being raythor a popular character, I'm uncommonly sought after."

"You shall travel by night, if you will," responded Staunton. "My principal object in seeking you out at once, was to make the bargain."

"It's made, then, my lord—and the thing itself is as good as done."

"Await me here," said Harold, after some few moments' reflection; "and we will make farther arrangements. I am about to penetrate into the other part of the building."

"That's what I often do," responded Chiffin. "Shall I accompany your lordship?"

"No. Remain here:"—and having thus spoken in a somewhat peremptory manner, Lord Harold was about to quit the chapel, when suddenly bethinking himself of something, he observed, "By the bye, I may require the means of procuring a light."

"And I can accommodate you," rejoined the Cannibal, at the same time drawing forth from one of his pockets a box containing matches, which he handed to the young nobleman.

Staunton then stole forth from the chapel; and threading the passage, reached the corridor communicating with the inhabited portions of the immense establishment. The moonlight penetrated through the windows; and as he beheld his shadow on the wall, he felt all the criminal ignominy of his position —as if he were a sneaking thief, prowling about the place where not long back he had been a known and acknowledged guest. But he passed onward, moving cautiously and stealthily,—stopping short every now and then to listen—and holding himself in readiness should he hear other footsteps, to take refuge in one of the many rooms by the doors of which he was passing. However, he continued his way undisturbed; and in a few minutes reached the door of that chamber which Lady Saxondale occupied when at the Castle.

But to his inexpressible annoyance, he found it locked. This was an event for which he was totally unprepared—a casualty indeed which had never once struck him. What was he to do? He tried the key of the cupboard which Lady Saxondale had given him: but it was much too small to turn the bolt of that lock. He leant hard against the door to ascertain if there were the chance of pushing it open: but it remained fast and immoveable. Ah! a thought struck Harold. Chiffin would no doubt succour him in this difficulty; and he at once began to retrace his way towards the chapel.

"Well, my lord," said the Cannibal, surprised to find him return thus promptly; "you've soon done your work, whatever it is."

"On the contrary," answered the young nobleman, "I have been unable to accomplish it. The truth is, it suits my purpose to penetrate into a particular chamber: but the door is locked."

"A door?" exclaimed Chiffin contemptuously. "What's a door? A dozen of 'em shouldn't keep me out, if I was resolved to get into a particklar place."

"Then come and open this particular one for me," said Harold. "But let us tread cautiously, for fear of alarming the household."

"*This* is what I do as I tramp about the place at night when going after my grub:"—and stooping down, Chiffin speedily whipped off his lace-up boots.

"Come then," said Staunton, who being more lightly shod, did not think it necessary to adopt the same precaution.

They issued forth from the chapel together, Chiffin carrying his club in his hand; and Lord Harold, observing this, took care to make him go in front as a wise precaution. In this manner they reached the door of Lady Saxondale's chamber; and Chiffin, taking a large nail from his pocket, endeavoured to pick the lock. This however he failed in accomplishing after a trial of about a couple of minutes: so putting his shoulder against the door, he burst it open with as much ease as skill. That is to say, he accomplished it with so peculiar a knack, that it made far less noise than Harold had fancied and feared when he saw what the man was about to do. Nevertheless, it did create a certain disturbance; and to the ineffable consternation of Lord Harold, as well as the momentary discomfiture of Chiffin, a cry of alarm in a female voice burst forth from the interior of the room. The Cannibal however instantaneously recovered his presence of mind; and rushing in, he dashed up to the bed, saying in a low but fearfully savage tone, "Silence this moment—or I will beat your brains out!"

"For heaven's sake do the woman no mischief!" said Lord Harold, following close at his heels, and speaking those words in a hurried and excited manner: for he was apprehensive that murder was about to be done—and he did not wish to have more crimes committed than were necessary.

"Oh, pray don't hurt me! pray don't hurt me!" said the female voice, speaking in wild terror. "I won't make a noise—I will lie quiet—I will do anything you desire."

"Well, then, you had better keep to your word—that's all I can tell you," was the Cannibal's growling response; "and if you do, no harm shall happen."

Lord Harold at once recognised the voice of Lucilla, one of Lady Saxondale's maids; and he was seised with the cruelest bewilderment how to act. Perhaps the girl had recognised *his* voice also? If so, the rumour would get spread abroad of this seeming burglarious entry on his part—and what would be thought? But he had gone too far to retreat: his position was desperate—and he decided upon pursuing at any risk the course on which he had entered. Fortunately the room was involved in almost complete obscurity: for no candle was burning, and the closed draperies at the window shut out the moonlight. Thus, if by good luck Lucilla should have been too much overcome by her own terrors to recognise his voice, there was no chance of her distinguishing his person.

All these reflections swept through the mind of Lord Harold Staunton in far less time than it has taken us to explain them; and being well acquainted with the chamber, for reasons which the reader can no doubt guess, he had not the slightest difficulty in finding the cupboard. Taking the key from his pocket, he opened it, and began feeling amongst the various articles its shelves contained, for the sealed packet. His hand encountered silks and satins, veils and ostrich-plumes, scarfs and frills, and all the elegancies of a fashionable lady's toilet: but his fingers came not in contact with the object of his search. Suddenly a noise like that of a door opening, met his ear; and the thought flashed to him that Lucilla's cry had alarmed the other domestics, who were coming to *reconnoitre*. But the sound ceased; and he therefore concluded that the creaking of the door arose from its being moved by the draught in the passage.

"If you can't find what you want," said Chiffin, who began to comprehend his lordship's difficulty, "strike a light—and I'll take precious good care to keep this woman's face covered over."

"Do anything—but spare my life!" moaned the terrified Lucilla.

"Don't be afraid, my dear," answered the Cannibal. "I dare say you are uncommon pretty—and I won't harm a hair of your head, if so be you keep quiet."

Lord Harold, without making any reply to Chiffin's suggestion—for he did not again choose to risk the recognition of his voice on Lucilla's part—nevertheless hastened to follow the advice given. Striking a match, he lighted one of the wax-candles—threw a glance towards the bed—and perceived that Chiffin was faithfully fulfilling his promise by keeping the girl's countenance covered up by the clothes. Staunton prosecuted his search by means of the light; and in a few moments was successful. Then he extinguished the taper; and the Cannibal knew thereby that the work, whatever it was, had been thus far achieved.

"Now, my dear," he said to Lucilla, "you'll have the kindness to keep as quiet here as you possibly can for the next hour. We have some more business to do somewhere else in the Castle; and I shall be standing outside in the passage to make sure that all is quiet. If so be you give an alarm or make the least attempt to do it, I shall rush in upon you, and——"

"I won't—I won't!" said the still frightened Lucilla, the terrible apprehension seising upon her that the ruffian, in order to make more sure, might on second thoughts deal her a death-blow at once.

The Cannibal and Lord Harold issued forth from the room together, and speedily retraced their way towards the chapel.

"There is not a moment to be lost," said Staunton, on gaining the door of the tapestry-chamber: "we must depart at once. But what did you mean by having a little more business——"

"Couldn't you understand?" exclaimed the Cannibal, with a chuckling laugh. "It was only a dodge on my part to make the girl keep quiet, thinking that I am still posted outside her door. Just let me get my boots, my lord—and I'll be with you."

Staunton at once proceeded to open the window in the tapestry-chamber, against which the convenient branch of the tree upreared itself. He speedily descended; and wading knee-deep through the water—for the river was somewhat swollen at the time—at length reached the bank at the north-western angle of the Castle. There, in about two minutes, he was joined by Chiffin.

"Is all quiet within?" was Staunton's immediate and hurried question.

"Yes—all quiet. That girl seems to have kept her word."

"Then let us proceed to some little distance hence," said Harold, "where we may make final arrangements, and then separate."

"Good!" answered the Cannibal: and they continued their way in silence along the bank of the river.

But now, as Staunton felt in the breast-pocket of his surtout coat for his handkerchief, he discovered that it was missing. He searched in all his other pockets—but without avail: he looked likewise in his hat—it was not there—the handkerchief was gone! Now, he perfectly remembered having used it when first making his stealthy entry into the Castle: for the leaves of the tree up which he had clambered, were covered with dew—and on stepping into the tapestry-room, he had wiped the moisture from his face. He had therefore dropped the handkerchief somewhere within the Castle—or else it had come out in the tree while he was making his descent. He stopped short suddenly—for the incident troubled him, inasmuch as his initials and crest were worked in the corner of that cambric handkerchief.

"What's the matter?" asked Chiffin, as the young nobleman thus came to a dead halt.

The loss was immediately explained.

"Well, you must leave it to chance, my lord," at once replied the Cannibal: "for perhaps by this time the household of the Castle is alarmed. And look!—it is so——By heaven, lights are moving about!"

Harold threw a rapid glance back towards the building, and perceived that Chiffin had spoken nothing but the truth. He therefore hurried onward, much annoyed and sorely troubled at the two circumstances which might serve as a clue to the discovery that he was one of the individuals who had made this mysterious and burglarious visit in the dead of night to Saxondale Castle. The first of those circumstances was that his voice had probably been recognised by Lucilla: the other was the loss of the handkerchief.

CHAPTER CXXI.

THE INVESTIGATION.

LUCILLA, as the reader has seen, had remained behind at the Castle instead of accompanying Lady Saxondale and Juliana to the Continent. This may be explained by stating that her ladyship and daughter had proceeded alone to France; for they could not bear the idea of taking with them any of the domestics who were so well acquainted with all that had occurred on the memorable day fixed for the double wedding. Now, Lucilla had a great idea of comfort; and she saw no reason why she should not occupy her ladyship's chamber during her absence. But firmly believing that the Castle was haunted, she was in the habit of locking herself in at night and placing the key under her pillow;—although we ourselves are unable to explain by what process of metaphysical reasoning she could have arrived at the conclusion that this would prove an effectual barrier against the intrusion of evil spirits.

As the reader may suppose, the poor girl was dreadfully frightened at the sudden bursting-in of the door: but she had kept as quiet as possible under the intimidation of Chiffin the Cannibal. After he and Lord Harold had taken their departure, she lay still for some minutes, until the thought gradually began to steal into her mind that the ruffian's assurance of remaining posted in the passage for the next hour, was merely a menace uttered in the hope of preventing her from giving an alarm. As her courage returned, this interpretation of the Cannibal's threat grew more feasible in appearance; and summoning all her fortitude to her aid, Lucilla got out of bed. Stealthily approaching the door, she listened with suspended breath. Not a sound met her ears: she pulled the door a little farther open: again she listened—and still hearing nothing, she peeped forth. The moonlight was powerful in the passage; and if any person had been there, she must have seen him, unless concealed in one of the doorways. But as no movement was made when the chamber door itself had creaked somewhat on her opening it, she was convinced that the coast was clear. Then she hastened to huddle on a few clothes; and speeding to the steward's room, knocked at the door. From within this functionary, being startled by the sound, demanded who it was, and what was the matter?

"There are people in the Castle," cried Lucilla: "they threatened to murder me if I gave an alarm!"

These words were caught by several of the other servants occupying adjacent rooms opening from the same passage as the steward's; and in a few minutes the entire household was aroused. Candles were lighted—the domestics, male and female, springing from their beds, hastened to put on some clothing—and Lucilla was speedily surrounded by numerous anxious faces whose looks denoted mingled curiosity and alarm.

Her tale was soon told. She had been aroused by the breaking in of the door—she had screamed out—a ruffian with a dreadful ferocious voice had menaced her with his vengeance if she did not remain tranquil—and while, under the influence of his dreadful threats, she desisted from any farther attempt to raise an alarm, the person who accompanied him proceeded to ransack her ladyship's cupboard.

"But you will never guess," added Lucilla, who was listened to with breathless attention mingled with excited suspense,—"you will never guess, I say, who that other person was."

"Who?" demanded numerous voices.

"Lord Harold Staunton," was the reply.

Ejaculations of astonishment burst forth; and the male domestics, being thus convinced that the disturbers of this particular night were at all events no ghosts or evil spirits, and that moreover they appeared to be only two in number, grew marvellously brave, and with common consent vowed to search the premises throughout in the hope of taking them captive. The first move was made towards the western side of the Castle: the tapestry-rooms were examined—and the marks of footsteps, wet and clayey, were distinctly traced to the window of that particular apartment by which Lord

Harold's entry, as well as his subsequent egress in company with the Cannibal, had been effected.

"The tree!" ejaculated several voices—thus at once indicating the general conjecture as to the means by which the intruders had entered.

The window was thrown up; and the full blaze of lamps and candles being poured upon the tree, the disturbed and ruffled state of the foliage proved the accuracy of the suspicion.

"Ah! what is that?" exclaimed the steward, who was foremost. "Something white——'tis a handkerchief! Stay—hold my candle while I climb out and reach it."

This was speedily done: the handkerchief was examined, and in the corner were discovered the initials and the crest of Lord Harold Staunton. Thus Lucilla's statement, if any doubt had previously existed in respect to its accuracy, was fully confirmed.

"Let us go through the rooms at once," said the steward, "and see if any other parts of the Castle have been visited."

By his directions the body of domestics broke up into three or four different detachments; and a general search commenced. It was therefore when the lights were moving about on the northern side of the building, that they were seen by Chiffin and Lord Harold as they were pursuing their way along the river's bank in the direction of Gainsborough. After a thorough examination of the premises, the detached bodies of domestics all re-assembled in the great hall; and adjourning into the banquetting-room, they held a conference as to the course that ought to be adopted. The result was that, as they had been left in charge of the Castle, it was their duty, irrespective of all other considerations, to make the circumstances and discoveries of this night known to some justice of the peace. At first the name of Mr. Hawkshaw was suggested: but when it was remarked that after what had taken place between himself and Miss Fairfield, it would perhaps be indecent to appeal to him in the present matter, or in any way mix him up with the affairs of the Castle, it was decided that Mr. Denison should be the magistrate invited to take cognisance of the affair. The steward accordingly wrote a letter, which he gave to a groom, with instructions to set off at seven o'clock in the morning to Mr. Denison's mansion. This being done, and it being now considerably past midnight, the conference broke up; and the domestics dispersed to their respective chambers, —Lucilla removing to the one which was specially her own.

The groom who was charged with the letter, set off in the morning but on arriving at Mr. Denison's, he learnt that this gentleman was passing a few days at Hawkshaw Hall. He accordingly mounted his horse again, and rode onward to the Squire's abode. On reaching the Hall, he found Mr. Hawkshaw and Mr. Denison walking together upon the lawn in front of the edifice; and he gave the letter into the hands of the latter, who, when he had read it, passed it to Hawkshaw, and then began asking several questions. The groom explained all that had taken place,—thus adding minute details to the rapidly-sketched outline which the steward's letter contained.

"This is most extraordinary," observed Mr. Denison, addressing the remark to the Squire: then turning to the groom, he said, "You can ride back to the Castle: I will follow immediately."

"It is indeed extraordinary," exclaimed Mr. Hawkshaw when the man had taken his departure. "There is some strange mystery in all this. That Lord Harold made his entry for the sake of actual plunder, cannot be supposed for a moment. Might it not be to possess himself of some documents or correspondence in Lady Saxondale's possession?"

"As I am appealed to in my capacity of a magistrate," answered Denison, "I am resolved to investigate the matter thoroughly. But as the transaction is shrouded with all the mystery to which you have alluded, it will be well to conduct the inquiry with as much secrecy as possible. Besides, it is one in which more than a single magistrate should be engaged. You must accompany me, Hawkshaw."

"Would it not be indiscreet," asked the Squire, "for me to meddle any more in the affairs of the Saxondale family?"

"Indiscreet?—nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Denison. "You must do your duty as a magistrate. Here is a case in which a downright burglarious entrance is effected in a particular dwelling; and for the sake of the servants themselves, the matter must be thoroughly sifted. Come—let us ride over to the Castle together."

Orders were accordingly given to get a couple of horses in readiness; and the two gentlemen lost no time in repairing to Saxondale Castle. They went alone together, unattended by any domestics, so as to prevent the gossip of one set of servants with another from spreading the affair throughout the neighbourhood.

On arriving at the Castle, Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw were conducted to the library, where they took their seats and proceeded to hear the evidence to be brought before them. Lucilla was first examined; and she deposed to the facts already known to the reader,—observing that she distinctly heard and recognised the voice of Lord Harold Staunton when he enjoined his accomplice not to do her a mischief.

"And have you examined the cupboard which was ransacked?" asked Mr. Denison.

"No, sir," she replied: "for Lord Harold Staunton locked it again, and took away the key with which he had opened it."

"To your recollection," proceeded Mr. Denison, "did the key seem to turn easily in the lock, as if it were the one properly fitting it? or was there any difficulty, and was violence used?"

"I was very much frightened and bewildered at the time," responded the young woman; "but as far as I can recollect, the key appeared to open the cupboard instantaneously."

"Could it possibly be," whispered Hawkshaw to Mr. Denison, "that her ladyship entrusted Lord Harold with that key for a particular purpose? But no!—such an idea is scarcely credible: she would not instruct a person to break into her own dwelling, when she might give a messenger the proper authority to search anywhere for what she wanted."

"It is very mysterious," observed Mr. Denison.

Lucilla, having signed her deposition, which this gentleman carefully took down, was succeeded as a witness by the steward, who deposed to the discovery of the handkerchief, which he produced.

The cook then stated that for some little time past

she had noticed that provisions had disappeared from the larder during the night-time in an unusual way—but that thinking some of the other servants might have paid the place a visit at irregular hours, she had never mentioned the circumstance until the incidents of the preceding night had forcibly reminded her of it; and that when she mentioned it, all the domestics were unanimous in declaring that they had never visited the larder or pantry without the knowledge of the cook or butler.

"From this circumstance the inference would be," said Mr. Denison, "that some one has either been secreted in the Castle, or else has paid very frequent visits to its interior in a stealthy manner."

The steward now produced a tobacco-pipe, which had been found during the search of the past night, in the cloister opening from the chapel: but this was held by the magistrates as scarcely to prove the fact of any one having been secreted in the Castle, inasmuch as the pipe might have been accidentally left in the cloister by the individual who accompanied Lord Harold. The servants then proceeded to inform Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw of the belief which had become almost general amongst the household, that the western part of the building was either haunted by evil spirits or was occasionally visited by ill-disposed persons:—lights had often been seen there; and on the night preceding the departure of Lady Saxondale and Juliana, very extraordinary things had taken place. A great light had been seen to shoot from one of the windows of the tapestry-rooms; and that same room was subsequently found in the utmost disorder, a large portion of the tapestry being destroyed. There was another incident that was now mentioned: namely, that about a fortnight back the door of that very room, which Lady Saxondale had herself locked on the night alluded to, was found to be burst open.

"All these circumstances," said Mr. Denison, "certainly tend to prove that some evil-intentioned person or persons have at different times obtained admittance to the Castle."

But there was yet another incident to be mentioned: and this was the occurrence which had first tended to create the belief that the western part of the building was haunted. That occurrence, it will be remembered, took place on the very day preceding the arrival of Lady Saxondale and Juliana at the Castle, when they left London at the time of the flight of Constance with the Marquis of Villebelle. Robert, one of the footmen, now repeated to Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw what had then happened—how on going into the chapel to open the windows there, he saw that the door of the vestiary which he had noticed to be open a few minutes before, had suddenly and mysteriously become closed. He farther stated that when returning to the chapel some hours later on the same day, he had seen a shape glide into the vestiary. On this occasion he was accompanied by two or three other servants, who likewise saw the same shape; and these individuals now corroborated Robert's story.

Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw, having listened to all those various statements, proceeded to examine the premises. In the first place they repaired to Lady Saxondale's chamber, which had been forcibly entered: they saw that the door was burst open—they found the cupboard locked, and without the slightest scratch or mark of violence near the key-hole: so that it would appear as if Lucilla's impression, that the key used by Lord Harold had acted easily and immediately, was strictly correct. From this room they proceeded to the tapestry-apartment, the door of which likewise was found to have been burst open, in corroboration of the statement of the domestics who had found it so a fortnight back. They opened the window—carefully examined the tree outside—and discovered unmistakable marks to prove that it had been used as a means of ingress and egress with regard to that window. Entering the chapel and the cloister, Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw, accompanied by some of the upper servants, instituted the minutest search; and behind one of the tombs they found a piece of bread not many days old. There were moreover half-a-dozen different places where the ashes from a tobacco-pipe had evidently been knocked out;—and thus the general impression seemed to be fully confirmed, that some one had been secreted in this part of the building.

Having finished their survey, Mr. Hawkshaw and Mr. Denison returned to the library, where they consulted alone together.

"What course do you purpose to pursue?" asked the Squire.

"The mystery is so great," replied Mr. Denison, "that it cannot be dealt with by ordinary means—such as the issuing a warrant for the apprehension of Lord Harold Staunton and his accomplice, if the latter could be known and found. Because it is just probable—though, as you yourself said, barely so—that Lady Saxondale herself may not be entirely a stranger to the proceeding. Besides, Staunton is the nephew of our friend Eagledean; and I should be sorry to take any step that would annoy the Marquis. One thing is very certain—which is that the Marquis believes his nephew to be upon the Continent: for this he communicated to me in a letter which I received from him the other day."

"Is it not possible that Lady Saxondale, though reputed to be in Ireland," said Mr. Hawkshaw, "is herself on the Continent, and that she may have fallen in with Lord Harold?"

"It may be so," responded Mr. Denison: then after a pause, he observed, "Do you know, Hawkshaw, that it has often struck me there was something very strange and mysterious in the connexion of Lord Harold Staunton and Lady Saxondale—much more so than even his uncle the Marquis suspected."

"Ah!" ejaculated the Squire: "that same idea has occurred to me also. Do you not think the better plan would be, in respect to present circumstances, to enjoin the domestics generally to keep the incidents of the past night a profound secret, and for us to communicate at once with the Marquis of Eagledean, who by his authority over his nephew, may discover and frustrate anything wrong that is going on."

"Such," answered Mr. Denison, "is the very course I should have suggested; and I am glad that you coincide with my views. As for writing to Lady Saxondale, it is out of the question."

"I have received a pressing invitation from Lord Eagledean and his son Francis, to visit them at Edenbridge Park in Kent, where they are at present: and if you concur in my proposal," added

Mr. Hawkshaw, "I will set off without delay and report everything to the Marquis."

"Be it so," responded Mr. Denison. "To you be this duty allotted. When will you depart?"

"This very day," answered the Squire,—"the moment, indeed, I get back to the Hall."

The arrangement being thus made, the steward, the butler, and Lucilla, were summoned into the presence of the magistrates, and were enjoined by them to keep secret the occurrences of the previous night, and to request their fellow-servants to be equally silent on the matter. Faithful promises to that effect were given,—whereupon Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw took their departure from Saxondale Castle.

CHAPTER CXXII.

EDENBRIDGE PARK.

Between Edenbridge and Tonbridge, in one of the most beautiful parts of Kent, and at a distance of about seven-and-twenty miles from London, was situated the principal estate in possession of the Marquis of Eagledean. The mansion was one of those huge red-brick piles which sprang up in the time of Queen Elizabeth, and are characterised by the particular style of architecture belonging to that age. During the long absence of the Marquis on the Continent, the edifice had been left in the charge of a few old dependants of the family, and the estate to the care of a faithful steward. Thus, though for many years unvisited by their noble owner, both the mansion and lands had been kept in excellent order; and when, about a fortnight previous to the exact date of which we are writing, the Marquis determined to remove with his family from his recently acquired property at Stamford Hill, to Edenbridge Park, everything was soon in readiness for their reception. The necessary complement of domestics was speedily made up; and, with the promptitude which characterised all his lordship's proceedings, immense quantities of new furniture, as well as other embellishments and decorations, were sent down from London.

It would be impossible to conceive a more perfect paradise than this estate of the Marquis of Eagledean. Near the house there were large pieces of ornamental water, on which floated many stately swans; and in the immense park numerous herds of deer might be seen browsing on the sweet grass. The flower-gardens were admirably laid out, and contained several conservatories filled with the rarest plants: the fruit-gardens were spacious; and in this autumnal season of which we are now writing, the boughs were laden with their clustering gems. A crystal streamlet meandered through the verdant meadows where the cattle grazed, the sheep fed, and horses frisked about. The estate, consisting of many acres, was dotted with numerous little groves and coppices: its lanes afforded beautiful rides—its fields delicious walks; and altogether it was a spot in every sense calculated to enchant the eye during the genial season of the year—while the spacious mansion afforded every luxury and comfort suitable for all seasons.

It was here, then, that the Marquis of Eagledean had for the present taken up his abode, with his wife, Lord Everton, and his own two children. We may observe that Lord Everton was completely restored to health, both mental and physical; and that he had succeeded, without farther opposition on the part of his unnatural uncle, to the title and estates from the enjoyment of which he had so long been cruelly debarred. His engagement with Henrietta Leyden, already sanctioned by the Marquis of Eagledean when passing under the *incognito* of Mr. Gunthorpe, had received the full concurrence of his mother: and it was arranged that the nuptials should take place at the ensuing Christmas season. Adolphus would have been much saddened at parting with his Henrietta when leaving Stamford Hill for Edenbridge Park, were it not understood that Mrs. Leyden, her daughter, and little Charley were to follow in the course of a week and pass some time at the same place. Count Christoval had been acknowledged and recognised as Elizabeth Paton's intended husband; and he had gone back to Spain, in order to make certain arrangements with respect to his own extensive estates and other possessions previous to the celebration of the bridal. Under these circumstances it was, therefore, indifferent to Elizabeth whether she resided for the present at Stamford Hill or at Edenbridge Park. But there was one to whom the removal was really painful, although he did the best to conceal his feelings: and this was Frank Paton. For he had conceived a growing affection towards the beauteous Angela Deveril: his heart had taught him that the emotions he had experienced towards Juliana were not those of a veritable attachment, and that the love he now cherished in respect to Angela, was of a very different quality. William Deveril and his sister had been invited, as well as the Leydens, to visit Edenbridge Park: but their coming was by no means to be so soon calculated upon as that of the latter; for Madge Somers still remained exceedingly ill at their villa near the Regent's Park, and they had resolved not to leave her so long as she lingered in this state. In that determination they were influenced, not merely by their sense of duty towards a fellow-creature, but likewise because they felt persuaded that her life was a most precious one in respect to themselves—or at least to William Deveril—inasmuch as the important revelation she had to make was as yet untold; and if she were to die ere it was made known, the secret would in all probability perish with her. Thus was it that they surrounded her with all possible attentions—watched over her as if she were a near and dear relative of their own—and awaited with much painful anxiety and suspense the time when her intellect should cease to wander, when her reasoning faculties should be settled, and when her power of speech should be restored.

One morning Francis Paton was walking alone in a grove of evergreens at no great distance from the mansion, when he heard footsteps approaching somewhat rapidly from behind; and looking back, he saw that it was his father who was coming to overtake him. He turned and joined his sire, who took his arm,—saying, "Frank, my dear boy, I wish to have some little private conversation with you."

The youth coloured up to the eyes: for the conviction struck him that the Marquis was about to speak on the topic nearest his heart—and the idea

that a love-secret is penetrated by those who have authority to pronounce an opinion in the matter, is invariably fraught with confusion on the part of the young. Besides, Frank had not ventured to breathe to his parents this secret of his love, for fear lest they might think him volatile and whimsical in thus conceiving a new passion so soon after his hope of espousing Juliana Farefield had been destroyed.

"Frank," continued the Marquis of Eagledean, as they walked slowly together along the verdant embowering avenue, "there is something upon your mind: you are not altogether happy. Before we left Stamford Manor you were gay and cheerful—but during the fortnight we have been at the Park, I have noticed that a change has come over you. Tell me what it is. You know that in me you possess an indulgent parent, and that your mother is the same."

Frank made no answer: he wished to confess the truth—but he could not find appropriate words wherein to frame it.

"I see," said the Marquis, with a half-smile upon his countenance, "that I must guess for myself. The truth is, Frank, you have not beheld with indifference the beautiful and amiable sister of my young friend William Deveril."

"Oh, my dear father!" exclaimed Frank, the colour now literally glowing upon his cheeks: "what will you think of me? Must you not deem me changeable—eccentric to a degree—foolishly susceptible——"

"What, in respect to one who is every way so worthy of your esteem and love!" cried the Marquis. "No, my dear boy," he went on to say, perceiving that the sunniest joy was now dancing in the youth's eyes; "I shall not judge you thus harshly. All along I have in reality comprehended your secret: I have seen you happy and gay in Angela's society—I have studied your feelings in her presence—I fathomed what was passing in your soul. But I said nothing—nor did your mother: we wished to put your heart to a fair trial. Indeed, I should not have mentioned the circumstance to you at so early a stage, were it not that it pained me to see you thus falling into despondency since your arrival at the Park. But cheer up, my dear Frank—for I can tell you that you are not altogether indifferent to Angela herself"

Nothing could exceed the rapture with which the youth heard this announcement; and his joy testified itself in the liveliest manner.

"Yes—make yourself happy," continued the Marquis:—"for if at the expiration of a few months you still feel the same interest in Angela, you will have my free permission to avow your attachment. I am in hopes that in three or four weeks' time Mr. Deveril and his sister will be enabled to join us here; and then you will have still farther opportunity of cultivating the acquaintance of that pure-minded and excellent young lady."

Having thus spoken, the Marquis wrung the hand of his son with the warmest demonstration of affection; and turning away, left him to ponder joyfully upon the scene which had just taken place, and which though so brief, had nevertheless infused unspeakable happiness into the youth's soul.

As the Marquis of Eagledean was retracing his way towards the mansion, he was met by a liveryservant, who announced that Mr. Hawkshaw had just arrived. His lordship hastened on to the house; and proceeding to the apartment to which the Squire had been already shown, gave him the most cordial greeting. He proposed at once to conduct him into the presence of the Marchioness, and introduce him to her ladyship: but Mr. Hawkshaw said that he had not merely come on a visit of pleasure, but likewise on one of business, and that he would seize that immediate opportunity of acquitting himself of the latter. The Marquis now perceived, by the Squire's countenance, that he had evidently something of importance to communicate; —and he prepared to listen. Mr. Hawkshaw then related all those circumstances which had occurred at Saxondale Castle, and which are known to the reader.

"But what is more," added Mr. Hawkshaw, "I was determined, while passing through London, to ascertain if possible where Lady Saxondale is. I accordingly repaired yesterday to Saxondale House in Park Lane, and inquired for her ladyship,—assuming ignorance of the fact that she was not at home. To my astonishment I was asked which Lady Saxondale I meant?—and on giving the proper answer, learnt that Lord Saxondale, the son, had within the last few days married a certain Baroness de Charlemont——"

"The Baroness de Charlemont!" exclaimed the Marquis of Eagledean. "What! the woman who was tried for the murder of her husband? I remember reading the whole case in the foreign newspapers about a couple of years back."

"Indeed!" said Hawkshaw, as much surprised as the Marquis had just been: "this is perfectly new to me: I never heard of it before. But it accounts for the strange look which the domestic wore when speaking to me at Saxondale House."

"The infatuated madman!" cried the Marquis; "to think that he could have committed such an egregious folly! But let us not suffer his proceedings to divert our attention from the more important topic which we are now engaging in. Did you succeed in learning where the Dowager Lady Saxondale is at present?"

"Yes," responded Hawkshaw; "I pretended to have urgent motives for ascertaining the fact, inasmuch as I saw a certain unwillingness on the domestic's part to inform me. I said that I came from Lincolnshire expressly to see her ladyship, and that it was peremptory I should know how soon a letter would reach her. Then the man let out that she was in France, with her daughter the Hon. Miss Farefield."

As the Squire mentioned this last name, a dark cloud gathered upon his countenance; for though he had been terribly avenged upon Juliana, yet he could never think of her without a recurrence of that feeling of hate which had succeeded his once passionate love.

"And Lady Saxondale is in France," said the Marquis. "Oh, fatal mistake on my part to send Harold travelling by himself upon the Continent! Much better to have kept him somewhere under my own eye in England! But the mischief is done, and cannot be recalled. Yes—there cannot be a doubt of it: he has seen Lady Saxondale—and there is some new plot now hatching. But its nature defies all conjecture. I know not what course to

adopt. Where shall I seek for my nephew?—and even if I found him, what regard would he now pay to my authority, after having so flagrantly and deliberately violated it by coming back to England?"

For some minutes the Marquis of Eagledean remained wrapped up in thought; and Mr. Hawkshaw did not break upon his silence—for he had nothing to suggest.

"It will be better," said the Marquis, after a long pause, "not to mention for the present these circumstances to any other person beneath this roof. It would only distress them to know that I experienced fresh troubles in regard to my graceless nephew. In whatsoever course that is to be adopted, I must be governed by circumstances; and as you, my dear Hawkshaw, are now to be my guest here for a while, we shall find opportunities to consult together. Come," added the Marquis, more cheerfully, "let me introduce you to her ladyship. You will likewise find her son Lord Everton with her in the drawing-room. Our Frank, to whom you were so kind in Lincolnshire, is walking in the grounds, but will be in shortly;—and our Elizabeth, to whom you have yet to be introduced, has gone to Tonbridge to visit a poor family whose distress accidentally reached our knowledge."

But while Mr. Hawkshaw is being presented to the Marchioness of Eagledean and Adolphus, and also renewing his acquaintance with Frank, we will direct the reader's attention to a little adventure which Elizabeth Paton experienced at the same time in the vicinage of Tonbridge.

Having been driven over in the carriage, shortly after breakfast on the day of which we are speaking, she ordered the equipage to be put up at the principal hotel in the place, as she had not only to visit the poor family of whom her father had spoken to Mr. Hawkshaw, but likewise to make a few purchases for her mother and herself. The cottage where the

distressed family dwelt, was about a mile out of the town; and having ascertained its precise whereabouts, Elizabeth set forth to walk thither. The case may be described in a few words. A labouring man, remarkable for the excellence of his character, had suddenly met his death by some shocking accident, leaving a wife and large family of children totally unprovided for; while an unfeeling landlord had actually put a seizure upon the little furniture immediately after the funeral was over. Some trifling subscription had been made by a few of the humane portion of the inhabitants of Tonbridge; but the sum was barely sufficient to meet pressing emergencies—while the poor woman and her large family had nothing to ensure them against want for the future. Such was the case which having by accident reached the ears of the Marquis of Eagledean, he had purposely sent his daughter Elizabeth to relieve: for he loved to make her as much as possible his almoner, so that by every good deed she accomplished, she might feel that she was making atonement for the errors of her own past life.

It was with no niggard hand that the bounty of the Marquis was dispensed on this as on all other occasions, through the medium of his daughter; and she had the satisfaction of relieving the poor widow's mind from all care for the future. She quitted the cottage, followed by the blessings of those she left behind—and began to retrace her way to the town. Her path lay through the fields—and in one place along a high hedge, out of which numerous tall trees sprang up. It was a beautiful but a lonely spot; and as the day, though at the beginning of October, was exceedingly warm, with a bright sun shining,—the trees, glowing with their rich autumnal tints, furnished a grateful shade. As Elizabeth Paton was continuing her way, she noticed a man seated under a tree at a little distance ahead, and smoking a pipe. She thought nothing of it until she approached nearer—when an ejaculation of surprise burst from his lips; and as he started up, the ferocious and never-to-be-forgotten countenance of Chiffin the Cannibal was revealed to her view.

She recoiled with ineffable horror from the presence of that wretch whose hands she knew to be stained with gore. She had never seen him since the murder in the barge; and that murder she knew at the time he had committed: for the reader will remember how she expressed herself to Solomon Patch with disgust and aversion upon the subject. But if she had not seen Chiffin since then, she had read of him; and the newspapers had informed her of another deed of blood that he had committed—namely, the assassination of that same Solomon Patch and his wife. No wonder therefore that Elizabeth Paton should recoil from his presence when he thus suddenly started up before her, as if it were a hideous reptile springing at her from the hedge in the shade of which he had been seated. But Chiffin mistook that abrupt movement on her part as indicative only of astonishment at thus falling in with him: for he could not suppose that one who had played the part of a daring highway-woman, could be very nice as to her sentiments in respect to the deeper and darker crimes which he had committed. Besides, he was totally ignorant of the fact that she was the Marquis of Eagledean's daughter: he had no idea of the great change which had taken place in her position: and when he thus beheld her handsomely attired, it excited no suspicion of the sort, inasmuch as she had always been wont to dress with elegance.

"What, Lady Bess!" he exclaimed, a grim smile of satisfaction appearing upon his villanous countenance. "Who the deuce would have expected to see you here? You look like one just dropped from the clouds. It's quite a pleasure, I declare, to fall in with an old acquaintance in this manner! Why, I really don't think you and me have ever met since that business at Hornsey—at Beech Tree Lodge, you know"

While the Cannibal was thus speaking, Elizabeth Paton had time to collect her ideas. The conviction instantaneously struck her that it would be the height of imprudence to make an enemy of Chiffin. He knew too much of her antecedents when she was pursuing her criminal though wildly romantic career, for her to feel herself sufficiently strong in her own new position to provoke him. He might travel out of his way to do her a mischief; and as for her taking any step to surrender him up to justice, it was for the same reasons altogether out of the question. Painfully humiliating, and fraught with a poignant remorse, were these reflections for the Marquis of Eagledean's daughter, as they flashed through her mind: but nevertheless she was compelled to endure them—and they were moreover suggestive of that prudential course which she found it necessary to pursue towards the Cannibal. We need scarcely add that it never for an instant entered her mind to tell him of that change in her circumstances to which we have alluded: for such a proceeding, by proclaiming herself to be well off, would only lay her open to his cupidity and extortions.

"And what are you doing here?" she asked, conquering her repugnance so far as to speak without betraying the horror she felt at his presence.

"Oh! the usual thing—a little business in hand, you may very well guess," he replied with another grin.

"But this is rather a singular neighbourhood as a field for your exploits—is it not?" inquired Elizabeth, who felt, she knew not why, a growing curiosity to discover what had brought the Cannibal to the vicinage of Tonbridge.

"Why, you see I've got a good job in hand—and a deuced good employer too," responded Chiffin. "And that's not all either: for there's a little bit of personal feeling in the matter. But I suppose you've heard of my exploits lately—hav'n't you?"—and now his features assumed an expression of grim and hideous significancy.

"I have heard so much," replied Miss Paton, with an inward shudder, but with perfect outward calmness, "that I am surprised you trust yourself abroad like this in the day-light."

"Who the deuce would recognise me down here? Howsumever, as I was saying, I suppose you've heard of that business about Madge Somers—and that t'other business in Agar Town? I understand Madge Somers is in a fair way to recover: but those chaps, Deveril and old Gunthorpe—or the Marquis of Eagledean, as I now understand he is—gave information to the police about Madge's business; and it was that which made me keep out of the way at the time I thought of doing t'other affair in Agar Town."

Elizabeth Paton had kept her countenance admirably when her own father's name was mentioned by the Cannibal: but she naturally felt still more curious than at first to learn what had brought him into this neighbourhood; and the suspicion had all in an instant flashed to her mind, in consequence of what he said about a personal feeling in the business he had in hand, that it might possibly be connected with the Marquis.

"So you see, Lady Bess," resumed the ruffian, not for an instant apprehending that he was talking to one whose mode of life had entirely changed; for Lord Harold himself was ignorant of Elizabeth Paton's antecedents, and therefore had said nothing on the subject to the Cannibal,—"you see that I owe that old Gunthorpe a turn for blabbing to the police about me; and now I am likely to have satisfaction. But you hav'n't yet told me what *you* are doing in these parts."

"The fact is," answered Elizabeth, "I have got nothing to do, Chiffin. I came down here a few days back in the hope of doing a certain thing; and so I took quiet lodgings in the town—dressed myself out smart—and no doubt pass as a very respectable lady: but all the while I was making secret inquiries to help me in the business I had in hand. And now that I have got all the information I wanted, the fellows I told to come down and join me here, have not made their appearance; and I have learnt that they are in trouble, and not likely to come. The consequence is, I have got no one to help me in this little affair: and I cannot possibly do it alone."

"Can't I help you?" demanded Chiffin. "The business I have come about, I dare say will be over to-night——But then, though, when I come to think of it," he added seriously, "I shall have to cut and run immediately after; and so it's no use talking. And yet," he went on to say, still thoughtfully, "my business may *not* come off to-night: for it all depends on some inquiry which my employer has got to make in a certain quarter: so you may just as well tell me what you thought of doing, and I'll see if I can help you. But is it pretty safe? and is there much to be got by it? Don't let it turn out as that affair with the two lawyers did, when you got so nicely took."

"On the contrary," responded Elizabeth Paton, "it is quite safe—and there is plenty to be got by it. You have already mentioned a name which I had uppermost in my own mind——"

"What's that?" asked the Cannibal quickly. "Eagledean's?"

"Just so," rejoined Elizabeth.

"The deuce it is!" ejaculated Chiffin. "Well, this is odd! Then I suppose you meant a crack at the Park?"

"That is precisely what I did mean. The Marquis has a mint of money with him, and always keeps it in his room at night."

"A mint of money?" echoed the Cannibal, his eyes sparkling with reptile-like glare at the information. "But what sort of inquiries have you made?"

"All that are necessary," answered Elizabeth Paton: "and what is more, one of the female-servants at Edenbridge Park is in league with me. But of course she and I couldn't do it alone; the Marquis might awake—an alarm might be raised——"

"I understand all about it," interrupted Chiffin: "you must have some sturdy resolute chap who would knock him on the head in a minute. Well, I'm your man."

"Indeed! you will undertake it?" cried Elizabeth, affecting to be much rejoiced, while she inwardly shuddered at the murderous way in which the ruffian had alluded to her father.

"To be sure!" rejoined Chiffin; "and what's more, I shall be able to do two jobs in one. Well, the longer I think of it, the more odd seems this coincidence, as your learned folks would call it. Why, what do you think, Lady Bess? *My* business is also at the Park."

"Then some one that I had spoken to on the subject, must have given you the idea, without mentioning how he himself got it?"—and Elizabeth Paton affected indignation at this feigned betrayal of a scheme altogether imaginary: for the reader will very well comprehend that the purport of all she was saying was merely to draw the Cannibal out.

"No, nothing of the sort," he responded. "None of your pals has nosed upon you: 'cos why, I hav'n't seen any such fellers for a long time past. It's a coincidence, as I just now said, and that's all."

"Then *you* also meant a burglary at the Park?" observed Elizabeth inquiringly.

"Summut more than that. I meant to put old Gunthorpe—Eagledean I mean—out of the way; and deuced well I am to be paid for it too. Why, what do you think? I have been hiding in Saxondale Castle, all the way down in Lincolnshire, for some weeks past: and the chap that wanted me to knock old Eagledean off the hooks, came and found me out on purpose. So you see what a necessary sort of blade I am to some folks."

"Indeed you must be!" responded Elizabeth. "But who is this person that thus sought you out?"

"Well, I don't know that I need exactly tell that," replied Chiffin: "'cos why, it's nothing to our present purpose."

"Oh, of course not!" quickly exclaimed the lady, not choosing to appear too curious, for fear of exciting the Cannibal's suspicions.

We pause a moment to state the real reason why Chiffin would not be explicit on that point to Elizabeth Paton. It was not that he mistrusted her, or that he had the slightest misgiving as to the truth of all she was saying: but it was because he calculated that if, by means of murder, Lord Harold Staunton should become Marquis of Eagledean, he (Chiffin) would have a constant hold upon him. The possession of that tremendous secret would enable him—even from America, whither he purposed to betake himself—to make incessant drains upon the young nobleman's purse; and he did not choose any other person, by the knowledge of the same secret, to have a share in that prospective system of extortion.

"Well," he resumed, "suppose you and me, Lady Bess, club together in this business? The fact is that you can supply the very information my employer is now endeavouring to get at."

"And what is that?" inquired Elizabeth.

"The room where old Eagledean sleeps at the Park. Once let me know *that*, and I would be bound to get in. But if so be you know it already

—as of course you do, since you have got a friend inside the premises—the whole thing can be managed as comfortable as possible; and you and me can share a jolly lot of swag."

"Agreed!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "Nothing will suit me better than to have such a companion as you in this business."

"And now about the arrangements, then?" said the Cannibal.

"They can be settled in a few minutes," answered Elizabeth: then drawing forth a letter from her reticule, she tore off a blank page; and with a pencil, which she likewise had at hand, prepared to make a sketch to suit her own views. "Lend me your hat, Chiffin," she said, "that I may convert it into a table."

The ruffian gave her his hat; and sitting on the bank by his side, she placed the paper upon the crown, and commenced her sketch, explaining the meaning of the details as she went on.

"This is the front of the house, you see; and here is the portico of the entrance. The top of it is level with the first-floor windows. One of the windows, you perceive, looks upon that portico, which is flat at the top. The window belongs to a small room which is unoccupied. A rope may be thrown out—you could climb up it—and so get on the top of the portico."

"But how's the rope to be throwed out?" asked Chiffin. "I wouldn't trust that servant-friend of your's: it might be all a plant on her part."

"But you would trust me, Chiffin," said Elizabeth Paton, "if I were to get inside the house and fasten the rope for you to clamber up by?"

"To be sure! But why not, if you are once inside, creep down stairs and open one of the doors?"

"For the simple reason," replied Elizabeth, "that the Marquis takes very good care to have all the keys delivered into his hand every night before he goes to bed."

"Then how will you get in?" demanded the Cannibal.

"The woman-servant will let me up into her own chamber before the house is fastened for the night. In short, I should dress myself in humbler apparel—as I have done before—and go and visit her as a friend; so that it would not seem odd before the other servants for her to offer me part of her bed for the night. She of course must have a third share of whatever we get, as she will have to decamp directly the business is done."

"Ah! now I begin to see better into all your arrangements," said the Cannibal. "I suppose that you would creep down from the servant's chamber to that room looking on the portico, and get the rope in readiness? Well, so far so good: but what about dogs, or watchmen, or what not, on the premises at night?"

"Nothing of the sort to be apprehended," answered Elizabeth. "There are no watchmen—and the dogs are at the back of the building. You see that I have made the minutest inquiries; and the arrangements I am now proposing to you, are precisely those I intended to have had carried out, if those fellows that I spoke of had come to their appointment."

"And it's lucky they hav'n't," exclaimed Chiffin: "'coz why, the thing has now fell into my hands. Depend upon it we'll do the business as snug as possible. But why not one of them windows on the ground-floor?"

"Because," returned Elizabeth quickly, for she had a prompt answer to every objection that might be raised to her proposed scheme, "there is a porter who sleeps in a little room next to the entrance-hall; and he would be sure to hear the opening of the shutters of a ground-floor window."

"Then one of the windows at the back of the house?" suggested Chiffin.

"No—for have I not already told you that there are dogs in the rear of the premises? and though they are chained up, they would of course raise a disturbance. Depend upon it, I have well weighed every part of my plan—and I know it is the best. I have been two or three times already to the premises, and therefore know perfectly well that all I tell you is accurate."

"Then let it be as you say:"—and Chiffin confirmed his assent with a terrible oath.

"Precisely at midnight," said Elizabeth Paton, "I shall expect you."

"And I sha'n't fail," rejoined the Cannibal. "But you must get the rope and all them kind of things."

"Trust to me," answered Elizabeth. "And now good-bye till we meet again at midnight."

"Good-bye, Lady Bess: and I hope we shall have luck."

The Marquis of Eagledean's daughter then took her departure from the spot where she had thus remained conversing with the Cannibal for the best part of an hour; and as she disappeared from his view he said to himself, "Well, this is a lucky job! Who would have thought it? Instead of getting a beggarly five hundred pounds, as Lord Harold promised me, there's every chance of sacking some thousands. She said a mint of money. *That* must mean a jolly lot: but at all events, whatever I do get as my share, will be so much gained over and above Lord Harold's five hundred. I didn't tell her who my employer is: *that* wouldn't have done. I must keep it all to myself. And I sha'n't tell him either anything about my meeting with Lady Bess. He might refuse to have anything more to do in the business, if he learnt that I had let another into the job: he might even think better of it, and make his peace with his uncle by confessing the whole affair. Or he might raise objections, and say that it's *his* own money that I mean to help myself to in Eagledean's room. No—I will be mum upon the business. And now for another pipe."

The Cannibal continued to smoke for upwards of an hour after he had made these reflections; and at the expiration of that time Lord Harold joined him at the spot where he was awaited. But how changed was the young nobleman's appearance! He was dressed in threadbare garments, cut after a foreign fashion, and which he had purchased at an old-clothes shop in London. He had a great slouching hat which shaded his countenance—a red wig—and an immense beard fastened with gum to his chin. Indeed it ascended to the cheek-bones, thus concealing all the lower part of his face. He wore a moustache too—and had dyed his eyebrows with red ochre: so that altogether his own mother, were she alive, would not have recognised him. He had studied to

give himself the air of a distressed foreigner; and therein he had fully succeeded. It was in this guise that he had joined Chiffin at Tonbridge early in the morning of the day of which we are writing; and they had made an appointment to meet again at the spot where we now behold them.

"Well, my lord," said the Cannibal as Harold accosted him: "what news?"

"None," replied Staunton, in a tone of bitter vexation.

"None?" echoed Chiffin. "Then what have you been about?"

"I have been to the Park—or rather in the neighbourhood of it—and I watched for the appearance of one of the servants that I might get into discourse with him. But none fell in my way; and I was afraid of loitering about in the vicinity too long. I really do not know what is to be done. I see that this plan of mine will not do——"

"Well, I thought all along, my lord," observed Chiffin, "when you first told me of it this morning, that it was a queerish proceeding on your part—and a dangerous one too."

"How dangerous?" ejaculated Harold. "Why, you yourself did not know me on my appearing before you! How then could one of those domestics be likely to recognise me hereafter? But it is useless to discuss the matter. Some other means must be tried."

"If you will leave it to me, my lord," said the Cannibal, "I'll stake my existence that without any of these circumbendibus rigs, I'll go and find out in a few hours all that's necessary to know to enable me to do the business to-night."

"But how will you proceed?" demanded Lord Harold. "Observe! it is absolutely requisite to discover which is the bed-chamber of the Marquis."

"I know how requisite it is," rejoined the Cannibal: "but don't you bother yourself how I shall proceed. Perhaps I don't yet know that much myself. I shall trust to circumstances. But I say again, that if I don't find out all I want, I'll eat my own head."

"I am so fearful you will be recognised and apprehended," said Lord Harold. "From what you told me, my uncle knows you well——"

"But if I choose to run the risk as a stepping-stone towards getting my five hundred pounds," observed Chiffin, "what's the odds to you? If you had let *me* go about the work in the first instance, you wouldn't have had all this bungling."

"Perhaps not," said Lord Harold, reflecting profoundly. "Well," he exclaimed, after a long pause, "away with you! I see that I must trust it all in your hands."

"You can't do better, my lord. But where shall we meet again?"

"It is now one o'clock," said Harold, consulting his watch, which was however carefully concealed inside the pocket of his threadbare waistcoat. "It will take you a good hour to reach the neighbourhood of the Park: let us allow a couple of hours for your purpose—and another hour to return. I will remain here therefore till five o'clock: or at least I will not be far from the spot. If you do not come by five, I shall go and wait for you at that public-house where, as you told me, you slept last night."

"Well and good," answered the Cannibal: and he forthwith walked away at a good pace, as if fully in earnest to execute the commission which he had undertaken.

But, as the reader may well suppose, he did not find it necessary to proceed very far—being already in possession of all the information that was required—or at least thinking himself to be thus well informed. After walking about a mile across the fields, he stretched himself comfortably down under another hedge, and began smoking anew. Then he repaired to a lonely ale-house in a bye-lane, where he refreshed himself; and thus he managed to while away the time until the appointed hour for rejoining Lord Harold.

On returning to the spot where he had left the young nobleman, he found him anxiously awaiting his re-appearance; and throwing an expression of satisfaction into his countenance, he declared that he had obtained all the requisite information for the accomplishment of the murderous purpose that was entertained.

CHAPTER CXXIII.

ELIZABETH PATON'S CHAMBER.

On leaving Chiffin, the Cannibal, Elizabeth Paton lost no time in repairing to the hotel at which she had left the carriage; and it being soon got in readiness, she returned to Edenbridge Park. On alighting at the mansion, she learnt from the hall-porter that Mr. Hawkshaw had arrived, and that he had gone out in company with Frank and Adolphus to view the grounds. Elizabeth hastily ascended to her own chamber—put off her bonnet and shawl—and then descended to seek her father. Ascertaining that he was in the library, she proceeded thither; and found him pacing slowly to and fro in a thoughtful mood. On his side he at once saw by his daughter's countenance that she had something important to speak of; and she at once gave him to understand that such was the case.

She began to explain to him everything that had occurred between herself and Chiffin—all she had succeeded in gleaning from his lips—and how she had devised a scheme for inveigling him into the mansion. The reader will observe that she was unacquainted with the name of the person who had sought Chiffin out in his concealment at Saxondale Castle, and who was employing him to do the foul deed of murder of which he had spoken.

"Now, my dear Elizabeth," said the Marquis, who had listened with deep attention, but likewise with the most painful feelings, "you have thrown a complete light upon a subject which was perplexing me at the instant you entered. Yes—there can be no doubt of it!—the villanous employer of this dreadful man is no other than my own nephew Harold Staunton!"

"Is it possible?" ejaculated Elizabeth, with horror depicted in her countenance. "But how know you this, dear father?"

The Marquis proceeded to give explanations in his turn,—reciting all that Mr. Hawkshaw had told him relative to the mysterious visit of Lord Harold, in company with some ruffian, to Saxondale Castle. That this ruffian was none other than Chiffin, was now evident from what he himself had told Eliza-

beth: and equally clear was it that Lord Harold must be the Cannibal's employer in the murderous design against the Marquis. But then arose the questions — wherefore Lord Harold and Chiffin should have made that burglarious incursion into Lady Saxondale's bed-chamber at the Castle? and what it was the young nobleman had so diligently sought for in the cupboard? As a matter of course these were mysteries that defied all conjecture on the part of Lord Eagledean and his daughter Elizabeth: nor did that burglarious inroad appear to connect itself with the present scheme which by such a strange combination of circumstances had come to their knowledge.

"You know, my dear Elizabeth," said the Marquis, "that after my excursion into Lincolnshire to rescue Harold from the power of Lady Saxondale, I at once sent him abroad, without permitting him to remain an unnecessary hour in England, and without inviting him to Stamford Manor. That he did go abroad, I am well assured, inasmuch as I heard of him through a friend at Bruges—and subsequently I received a letter from the young man himself, written at Boulogne. I knew not *then* that Lady Saxondale was on the Continent: this fact I only learnt to-day from Mr. Hawkshaw. That she and Harold have met, I feel convinced. I can read it all! That fiend of a woman has inspired him with the heinous idea of taking my life, so that he may at once succeed to my title and estates. Hence his stealthy return to England—hence his seeking out the villain Chiffin, with whom I have the best possible reason for knowing that Lady Saxondale was at one time in correspondence. However, Providence has interposed in my behalf; and through this fortuitous meeting of yourself and Chiffin, my vile nephew's design is made known to us."

"Heaven be thanked," said Elizabeth fervently, "that we shall thus be enabled to frustrate it!"

"But I do not altogether understand, my dear Elizabeth," observed the Marquis, "the project that you have in view."

"Let me explain it fully, my dear father," returned his daughter; "and you can then inform me whether you approve of it. In dealing with Chiffin, I felt that I had two distinct objects to gain—two distinct ends to keep in view. The first and paramount object was not merely to baffle his design against yourself, but also to extort from him the fullest confession in respect to his employer: for I felt that it would not be merely sufficient to save your valuable life from the present diabolical design, but also to obtain a complete insight into the details of the foul conspiracy—so that by learning who the prime mover is, you might be fully on your guard for the future. This was one object. But observe!—I felt at once that the utmost prudence, blended with no small degree of cunning, was requisite to accomplish these aims. Suppose that instead of devising a scheme for entrapping Chiffin into a snare, I had merely given you such information as would enable you to frustrate his nefarious project:—in that case, even though he were handed over to justice, he might have retained secret until the last the name of his employer."

"I understand you, my dear Elizabeth: you have explained one of the two objects you had in view. I think, my dear girl, that I can fathom the other—but proceed to develop it in your own words."

"Father," resumed the lady, in a mournful voice, "it is a painful topic——very painful: but nevertheless it must be touched upon. You cannot have forgotten that when I narrated to you the history of my past career, it transpired to your knowledge that Chiffin and I were no strangers to each other. In short, he is acquainted with much of that dread portion of my history on which I can only retrospect with the profoundest sorrow. Being thus acquainted with my antecedents, it needs but a single word from his lips to proclaim to the world what your daughter has been. I should be covered with ignominy and disgrace: nay, more—my personal safety would be endangered; for in the special case of that adventure with Marlow and Malton, the identity which could not be established at Dover, might be indubitably fixed by a revelation or confession from the lips of Chiffin. Therefore it occurred to me in a moment, that as I dared not make an enemy of that man unless I got him completely into my own power, it was absolutely necessary to ensnare him in some trap craftily devised to catch him—and then dictate terms to which he would be but too glad to listen. By such a proceeding I foresaw that all my objects would be gained: the plot against your valuable life would be frustrated—the name of his employer would be elicited—and measures might be taken to induce him to leave the country on terms that would likewise seal his lips in respect to his knowledge of my antecedents. Rest assured, dear father, that as all these calculations swept through my mind, I experienced a terrible repugnance at being compelled to make terms with a ruthless assassin, instead of suffering him to be handed over to justice. But I thought that if my own reputation could be saved, while at the same time *he* should be disarmed of any power of injuring you for the future,—you would prefer the adoption of such a course."

"Can I hesitate for a moment, my dear child, to approve of your proceedings?" exclaimed the Marquis. "Yes — most assuredly I do approve of them!"

"And I thought," continued Elizabeth, "that by the scheme I had devised, Chiffin might be brought face to face with you and me alone—that his entry being effected without the slightest chance of alarming any of the household, the transaction which is to mark the coming night would rest between us three—and that not another inmate of the mansion need be one whit the wiser."

"With this view your plans have been admirably taken," said the Marquis; "and you have displayed an extraordinary degree of self-possession and forethought in dealing with that villain. Yes, Elizabeth —the whole affair shall be kept a profound secret. I had already told Hawkshaw not to mention to any one that he had brought me evil intelligence concerning my nephew. More than he already knows, he need not be made acquainted with: it is not necessary for him to be informed of the additional clue that has been obtained to the unravelment of Harold's execrable intentions. As for your mother, Adolphus, or Frank,—they need know nothing at all in respect to these proceedings: it would be worse than useless to distress their minds. And now, Elizabeth, let us arrange all the details for the efficient carrying-out of the scheme which you

yourself have initiated to disarm this dreadful man for the future, and rid the country of his presence."

The father and daughter accordingly deliberated for some little time longer: but it is not here necessary to record any more of their conversation. Suffice it to observe that for the remainder of the day they maintained an outward air of composure,—so that the Marchioness of Eagledean, Adolphus, Frank, and the Squire, were very far from suspecting that for the coming night they had such important proceedings in view.

It was the custom of the Marquis of Eagledean, his family, and his household, to keep good hours: but on the present occasion, having Mr. Hawkshaw as their guest, they could not retire quite so early as was their wont. But soon after eleven o'clock the inmates of Edenbridge Park had sought their respective chambers: and an observer from the outside, might have seen the various lights extinguishing one by one. Such an observer there was: namely, Chiffin the Cannibal—who a little before midnight reached the vicinage of the place; and scaling the fence which encompassed the grounds in the midst of which the mansion stood, he traversed the park, bending his steps towards the entrance-portico.

We must now explain that the particular window which Elizabeth had described to the Cannibal, belonged to her own dressing-room, whence a side-door communicated with her sleeping chamber. Immediately on retiring thither, at about half-past eleven, she suffered her maid to assist in disapparelling her of the rich and elegant raiment which had constituted her evening toilet—and likewise to loosen the masses of her raven hair, which now floated in dark luxuriance over her shoulders. She thus accepted as usual the services of the abigail, inasmuch as it would have seemed strange to dispense with attentions that were invariably rendered: but Elizabeth hastened to dismiss the maid as soon as possible; and the moment she was alone she extinguished the tapers, so that Chiffin from the outside might not behold lights burning in the windows contiguous to that whereby his entry was to be effected. But it was a beautiful moonlit night; and the argentine lustre, pouring into Miss Paton's chamber, served to guide her in whatsoever more she had to do.

She put on a morning wrapper; and then taking from a chest of drawers a pair of pistols which her father had lent her, she placed them conveniently at the foot of her bed, within the shade of the curtain. From the same drawers she drew forth a large coil of stout cord; and then passing into the dressing-room, she attached one end to a massive piece of furniture which was there, and which being against the wall near the window, would prove a sufficient resistance against any weight that the rope might have to sustain. Scarcely was this arrangement accomplished, when a gentle tap at the bed-room door met her ears; and she hastened to open it. It was her father, the Marquis of Eagledean, who entered. A few rapidly whispered words were exchanged between them; and he proceeded to conceal himself in the deep shade of the curtains at the head of the bed.

Elizabeth re-locked the chamber door, and passed again into the dressing-room. There she gently and noiselessly opened the window; and just at that moment she beheld the form of the Cannibal crossing the gravel-road forming the carriage-drive that led up to the front of the portico. She threw out the rope, so that it hung over the edge of the low parapet surrounding the top of that portico. She felt the cord tighten in the grasp of the Cannibal: he clambered up with considerable dexterity; and his grim ferocious countenance soon appeared above the level of the parapet. The moonlight streamed fully upon his features; and without saying a word, he bestowed upon Elizabeth Paton a significant look of satisfaction at the manner in which she had thus far carried out her arrangements with him. He stood upon the summit of the portico: she beckoned him to enter—and he introduced himself through the window into the dressing-room.

"We will draw up the rope," she said in a low whisper, "in case any one should happen to pass that way while you are engaged inside:"—and having done so, she likewise closed the window as noiselessly and carefully as she had opened it.

Chiffin had his club in his hand; and Elizabeth Paton knew that she must be full well upon her guard against any sudden blow which in his rage he might deal her at the first instant of finding himself caught in a trap. But her courage did not fail her: on the contrary, it acquired additional force in proportion to the growing emergency of circumstances.

"Tread gently," she said, in a low whisper so as to keep up appearances to the very last moment: "and follow me."

Thus speaking, she led the way into the bed-chamber,—the Cannibal walking as cautiously as if he were treading upon eggs. Elizabeth Paton glided on a few feet in front of him:—from the foot of the bed she snatched up one of the pistols she had deposited there; and her left arm she kept in readiness to ward off a blow from the ruffian's cudgel, or else clutch it with her hand, as circumstances might direct.

All in an instant she turned round upon him. In the brilliant moonlight did the pistol gleam before his eyes; and as she boldly grasped his club, she said, "Not a word—not a movement—or you are a dead man!"

The villain was astounded: he was literally transfixed with an astonishment so absorbing that it left not even scope for an ebullition of rage. At the same instant the Marquis of Eagledean stepped from behind the curtains; and in a low but hasty voice, he said, "You are in our power! If you raise an alarm, you are lost!"

Chiffin's discomfiture was complete. Elizabeth Paton held one pistol within a foot of his forehead: the Marquis had presented another as he spoke. His hang-dog countenance grew pale as death: horrible ideas swept like a whirlwind through his brain: the gibbet's noose seemed to be tightening round his neck: the floor felt like a drop about to give way underneath his feet.

"Yes—you are in our power," said the Marquis, hurriedly though firmly: "but I tell you at once that what may be your fate depends entirely upon yourself."

"But what does it all mean?" asked Chiffin, whose brain was in a complete whirl; and yet he moved not a single inch: he was excited in one sense with horrible apprehensions—and appalled as well as astounded in another.

"It means that you may purchase life and freedom," responded Lord Eagledean, "if you do our bidding."

"Well then, what is it?" demanded the ruffian, beginning to breathe more freely: for it naturally struck him that if he were really to be handed over to the grasp of justice, the officers thereof would likewise have been in ambush.

"It cannot be all explained in a moment," said the Marquis. "You must suffer me to take from about your person whatever means you may have of doing mischief. But I warn you not to attempt the slightest resistance: or one of these pistols will level you on the floor."

"And you don't mean me any harm," growled the Cannibal, "if I do as you wish?"

"Our present proceedings speak for themselves," replied Lord Eagledean. "If we had wished to hand you over to the vengeance of the law, we should not have been alone here to encounter you: and if it were your life I wanted, what is to prevent me from at once sending a bullet through the head of a man who thus burglariously enters my house?"

"Well then, I will trust you, my lord," said the Cannibal: but he could not prevent his reptile-eyes from glaring with diabolic malignity upon Elizabeth Paton, whose demeanour was however resolute and decided.

The ruffian surrendered up his club to the Marquis, who then proceeded to search his pockets,—Elizabeth standing by with the pistol pointed towards his head. A knife and a phial—the latter carefully enveloped in a piece of brown paper so as to prevent it from breaking—were the two principal articles thus discovered about the person of the ensnared Cannibal.

"Now," said Lord Eagledean, "sit down in that chair—and listen to what I have to say,—truthfully answering me likewise such questions as I may have to put."

The Cannibal obeyed; and as he placed himself in a large arm-chair which the Marquis had indicated, the pistol that Elizabeth Paton held in her hand, still pointed towards his head. He thus saw that although life and liberty were promised him on some conditions yet to be explained, those who had him in their power were nevertheless resolved to enforce their purposes and dictate their terms with unflinching resolution. If for an instant the idea of a sudden assault upon them both and a desperate attempt at escape, entered the ruffian's brain, it was immediately discarded: so utterly at their mercy did he find himself—and so impossible was it to render his condition worse by hearing what they had to say.

"I have already promised," said the Marquis, "that you shall be treated with consideration if you do as we desire: and I will not fly from my word. You have to choose between two alternatives; and I will at once present them to your view. One is, that upon pulling this bell,"—and the Marquis, as he spoke, caught hold of a silken cord hanging against the wall,—"the whole household will rush hither to seize upon the man for whom Newgate yawns: and I need not remind you of the fate upon which you would thus rush. The other alternative is, that if you will confess everything that I desire to know, and give me proof that what you say is correct, I will allow you to go hence—I will furnish you with a sum of money to take yourself out of England—I will make such arrangements that on your arrival in the United States you shall receive the sum of one thousand guineas. Now, which alternative do you select?"

"As if there was a question!" exclaimed Chiffin eagerly: then as a sudden gloom settled again upon his diabolical countenance, he said, "But how do I know that all this is to turn out as you say—and that when you have got out of me what you want to know, you won't give me up to justice all the same?"

"For this reason," answered the Marquis,—"that my own nephew has instigated you to a fiendish deed; and that I would fain spare that miserable young man from the damning ignominy of exposure, which must inevitably take place if you are surrendered up to justice."

"Well, my lord," observed Chiffin, evidently satisfied with this response, "it does look as if you was in earnest, and as it's all the same to me who I serve, as long as I get paid for my pains, I may just as well turn round on that precious nephew of your's as not. So now go on, my lord—and I'll be bound to say I'll convince you that the answers I give to your questions are the true ones."

"Respond briefly therefore, and in a straightforward manner," said the Marquis; "so that the present scene may be brought all the more speedily to an end. In the first place, how came Lord Harold to know you were secreted in Saxondale Castle?"

"'Cos why, my lord, Lady Saxondale told him as how I was the properest feller to do the little business he had in hand."

"And for what purpose did you and he pay that visit to Lady Saxondale's chamber, when you alarmed the servant-girl who was sleeping there?"

"By jingo!" exclaimed Chiffin, in astonishment, "your lordship knows everything! Why, you see, I myself wasn't aware till this morning what it was Lord Harold searched for in the cupboard, of which he had the key in his possession. But to-day he let me into that secret. The little bottle, my lord, which you just now took out of my pocket, is what your nephew wanted in that there cupboard at Saxondale Castle."

"And what does it contain?" inquired the Marquis, though he more than half suspected.

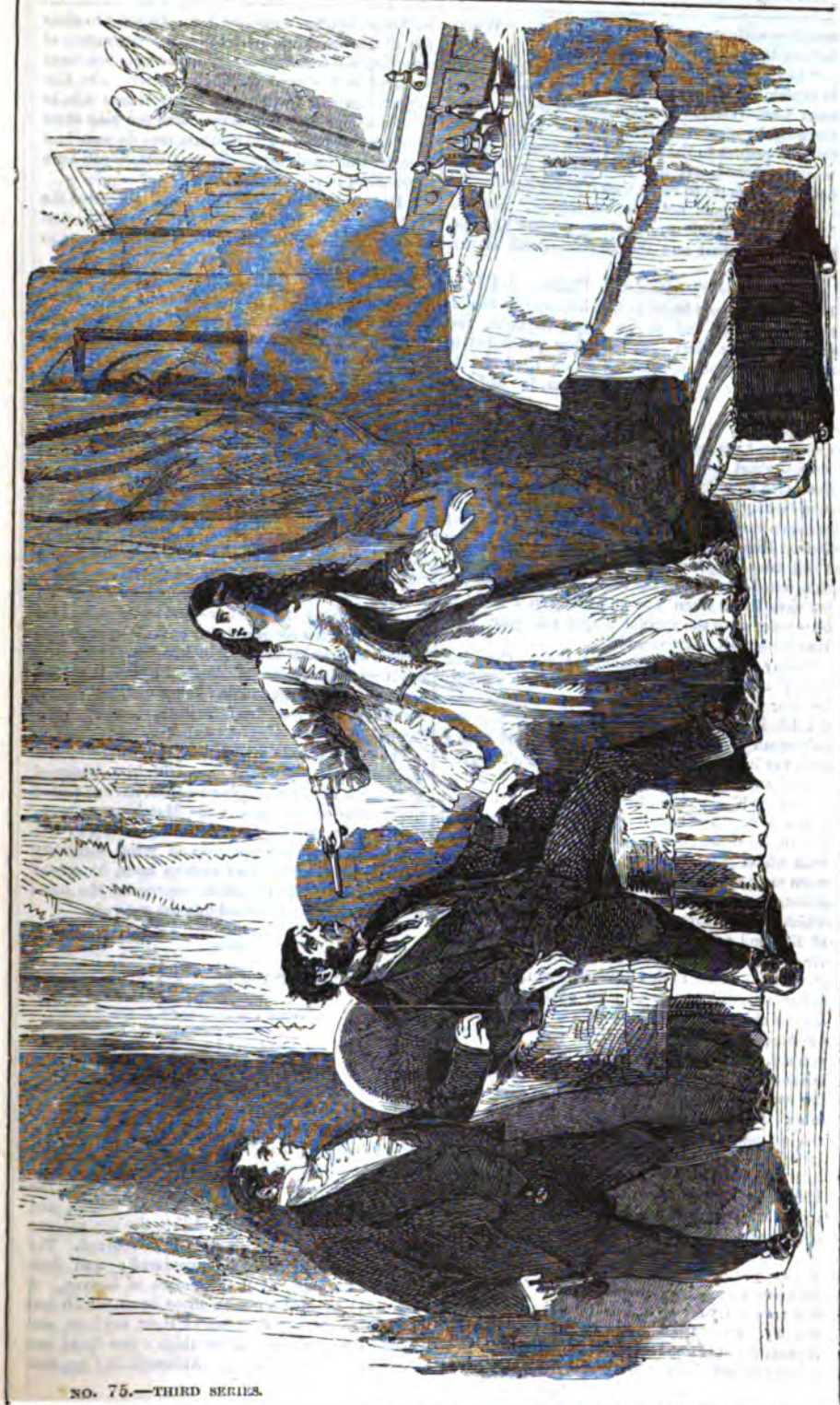
"A pison, my lord, one drop of which would kill a helephant, and therefore quite enough to give a man his gruel."

In the clear moonlight which flooded the chamber, the Marquis of Eagledean and Elisabeth Paton exchanged looks of unutterable horror at this dreadful announcement.

"And I suppose, then," continued the Marquis, "that you were to use this deadly venom against me——Harold's own uncle!" he added, in a voice that suddenly sank with the force of the emotions agitating in his breast.

"Well, my lord, that's about the rights of it," answered Chiffin: "and so I think that if you put two and two together, you'll see how nice all the circumstances fit into their proper places, and that I therefore am speaking the truth."

"Would to heaven that there were room for doubting you!" ejaculated Lord Eagledean: "but there is not:"—then subduing his emotions, and



speaking with renewed calmness, he said, "Where is Lord Harold now?"

"At Tonbridge, my lord:"—and Chiffin proceeded to explain the exact spot where he had appointed to meet Lord Harold Staunton at four o'clock in the morning, by which time it was supposed that everything in respect to the contemplated tragedy would be accomplished, and that he (Chiffin) would have had ample leisure to reach that trysting-place.

"But you would not have me believe," said the Marquis of Eagledean, "that my nephew has ventured undisguised into the neighbourhood of this domain?"

"Undisguised?" ejaculated Chiffin. "I'd be bound that if your lordship met him face to face in the open street and in the broad daylight, you wouldn't know him:"—and he then proceeded to describe the exact appearance which Lord Harold Staunton now wore in the disguise he had assumed.

"That you have answered truthfully to all my questions, I am certain," said the Marquis: "for I was informed by one of the labourers on my estate, that such an individual as you have described was seen lurking about in the vicinage this morning. I presume that you have nothing more to tell me? Indeed I have heard enough——far, far too much! I will now keep my word. But yet I have two things more to say. In the first place, what guarantee have I that when you go hence you will not at once proceed to the appointed spot and warn Lord Harold that all is discovered?"

"Why should I?" demanded the Cannibal. "Do you think, my lord, I care one single farthing for your nephew? Not a bit on't! Besides, even if I did, I know from what you have said that you only mean to give him a blowing-up; and then I dare say it will be all over. No—I sha'n't trouble myself any more about him."

"Listen!" ejaculated the Marquis, as a thought struck him. "The amount of money which you will find in the United States will depend on the fidelity with which you keep this promise not to go and warn my nephew of the failure and discovery of his detestable plot. But now to the other subject on which I had to say a few words. You will get out of England as quick as ever you can. It suits my views—no matter for what reason—that everything you know relative to this person,"—and he glanced towards his daughter, whom for obvious reasons he did not choose to proclaim as such in the Cannibal's presence,—"should be buried in oblivion. Were you out of malice or spite to mention to any one the incidents of her past life, it could not fail to reach her ears, and would in due course be conveyed to mine. I have promised that you shall find a thousand guineas at a bank in New York; and that promise I will faithfully keep. But if I find that you, with equal fidelity, adhere to the several injunctions I have given you, in three months' time I will remit you a farther sum of five hundred guineas. These remittances will be made through the American house of Godson, Gooding, and Company at New York: you cannot fail to remember the names. And now I will give you one hundred guineas, that you may see your way clear to escape out of the country. I was about to add, for my own sake, that it pains me much, and mortifies me more than I can express, to have thus to deal with such a one as you: but on my nephew's account I am disposed to show you all this mercy, as well as to adopt the means of removing you from a country whose laws you have outraged in the most criminal manner. On this subject, however, I will say no more—unless it be to express a hope that in another clime you may enter upon another career, and that you may do your best to make atonement for the hideous crimes you have perpetrated in your native land."

"It's very pretty spoken, my lord," answered the Cannibal; "and I think, what with the little bit of advice, together with the blunt, I shall manage to get on uncommon well amongst the Yankees."

The Marquis of Eagledean drew forth a packet containing a hundred guineas in gold; with which he had purposely provided himself ere seeking his daughter's chamber; and this amount he handed to Chiffin.

"Now," he said, "depart by the same way that you entered—so that there may be no possibility of alarming any of the inmates of the house."

For the first time throughout this scene, which had lasted about half-an-hour, the pistol was withdrawn from the close vicinage of the Cannibal's head; and securing the money about his person, he passed into the dressing-room, followed by Lord Eagledean,—Elizabeth Paton remaining behind in the bed-chamber. The window was opened—the rope was thrown out—and Chiffin slid down, reaching the ground in safety. The Marquis drew up the cord—closed the window—and returned to his daughter. They congratulated each other upon the success with which the project had been attended; but it was with renewed feelings of horror that they contemplated the detestable conduct of Lord Harold Staunton and the fiendish instigation of Lady Saxondale.

The Marquis bade Elizabeth "good night;" and taking the phial of poison away with him, hastened to secure it in some safe place:—then, having visited the chamber which he and the Marchioness occupied, to give some excuse for having sat up so late and likewise for the necessity of going stealthily forth from the mansion at such an hour, he armed himself with a pair of pistols—descended the staircase cautiously—and issued into the open air.

CHAPTER CXXIV.

THE CROSS-ROADS.

In a lonely spot within about a mile of Tonbridge, where two cross-roads met, Lord Harold Staunton was pacing to and fro with agitated steps. He wore that same deep disguise which we have already described, and beneath which he had hoped to conceal his identity from the knowledge of every one save his accomplice in meditated crime.

It was now verging towards four o'clock in the morning: he had not been in bed all night; and though there was a piercing chill in the air, yet was he hot with the feverish state of his blood. The beautiful moonlight had disappeared; and dark clouds had gathered over the face of heaven. A low wind moaned through those trees which had become completely denuded of their verdure, and rustled amidst the boughs to which a few dried and crisping leaves still clung. Although the appoint-

ment with Chiffin was for four o'clock at this place, yet Harold had been there since a little after two: for he thought that if his agent's work were done with more promptitude than was anticipated, he would lose no time in joining him at that spot.

It was, as already said, a lonely place; and all circumstances combined to render it gloomy enough. The darkness which prevailed—the moaning of the low wind—the rustling of the dead leaves on the withering boughs, produced impressions which, mingling with the dread thoughts and fearful apprehensions of Lord Harold Staunton, rendered him so nervous and restless, so uneasy and excited, that there were moments when he felt as if to tarry longer were impossible, and that he must fly precipitately from that spot. But still it was absolutely necessary to await the return of Chiffin—if he should ever come at all. But why did the young nobleman doubt his re-appearance? Did he suspect him of any treachery in respect to the compact which existed between them? No: but he feared lest Chiffin should fail in the enterprise which he had undertaken—lest he should be captured or killed in the prosecution thereof. And if so, then farewell to all the hopes which Harold had entertained! But even worse than mere disappointment might ensue. For if taken alive, Chiffin might be induced to confess everything: and who could tell to what an extent an outraged uncle might in that case go with the view of punishing a nephew who had sought his life.

Such were the wild fears which kept sweeping through the mind of that guilty young nobleman. They recurred again and again: he could not banish them. So far from that, they seemed to come back each time with renewed force: he felt that his brain was being worked up into the frenzy of a horrible suspense—and every now and then he said to himself in a sort of desperation, "No, Chiffin could not fail: he was so certain of success! Doubtless it is all over now—and I am Marquis of Eagledean!"

But then the moaning of the wind seemed to take the accents of human tones; and the word "*Murderer*" swept past his ears. And those rustling leaves too—they seemed to be the voices of the dead, echoing that same dreadful sound, "*Murderer!*" As he gazed upward, the very clouds appeared to assume hideous shapes—colossal and fantastic, though fearfully appalling: and thus on the face of the heavens themselves did it seem as if the stupendous tragedy which he supposed by this time to have been performed at Edenbridge Park, was being enacted all over again by those gigantic forms agitating on the theatre of the air. And then too he would recoil with a cold feeling of indescribable horror, as the fancy suddenly struck him that he beheld a pale and ghastly countenance looking at him over one of the withering hedges which skirted the roads; and though he knew it was but the imagination, yet the idea increased the terror of his thoughts and added to the sombre gloom of the scene.

We have said that it was a spot where two cross-roads met. At one of the angles formed by two of the diverging routes, there stood a portion of a thick upright piece of wood, which seemed to be the remnant of a finger-post that once was there to indicate to wayfarers the names of the different places to which the paths led. Lord Harold every now and then stood for five minutes together at this post, so as to command with his view the road up which he thought it most likely Chiffin would come. That is to say, he penetrated with his straining eyes, as well as he was able, through the depth of gloom, in the hope of discerning a human form approaching. But all was unbroken darkness there: time was wearing on—four o'clock was now approaching—and as yet Chiffin came not.

"But he is sure to come," said Harold to himself, as for the twentieth time he turned away from that post and resumed his agitated walk. "Yes he will come: he is certain to have succeeded—and he will bring me the intelligence that I am Marquis of Eagledean! He will not deceive me, because I told him that his reward was not to be paid until rumour should confirm the assurance of my uncle's death. He thinks that we shall go to London together—or at least that we shall meet there in the course of the next night, by which time I shall have ascertained that his tale is true. This is what he thinks; and therefore he will not deceive me. But such is *not* my plan. When he comes—and I am sure that he *will* come—his reward shall be at once paid him; and we shall separate—I hope never to meet again. Then away to France—and there will I affect to be travelling quietly and unostentatiously as the other day I was, until messengers overtake me to report that my uncle is dead, and that I am Marquis of Eagledean. And then what horror shall I pretend! what distress shall I assume!—— Hah! what was that?"

And in the midst of his dreadful musings, the young nobleman stopped short and listened. It seemed like a human voice that met his ears. But no: he felt assured it was naught save the wind—that same wind which had already terrified and startled him more than once since he had sought this gloomy spot.

Retracing his way in the direction of the post, he was again filled with a sudden trepidation; and a glacial feeling of intense horror swept over him, as a human voice once more appeared to reach his ears. He listened, while the cold perspiration stood out in large drops upon his forehead, and all the blood appeared to have stagnated in his veins. Yes—assuredly it was a human voice: but it was a sort of low chaunt or crooning which he heard. And now too he beheld some shape moving about near the post. Gathering his courage, he advanced; and when almost close up to the spot where the post stood, he discerned through the obscurity a wretched-looking old mendicant female tramping about,—half-muttering, half-chaunting some song the sense of which Harold could not catch.

"Ah! who are you?" she demanded, turning abruptly round upon him as the sounds of his footsteps on the hard frosty ground met her ears.

He now perceived that she really was, as he had fancied, a wretched ragged mendicant. She was very short in stature, with bowed form, and a countenance the most hideous and horrible he had ever in all his life beheld. It was shrivelled into a mass of wrinkles: the mouth went in at a sharp angle through the total loss of the teeth; while the thin, prominent, pointed nose gave a still sharper and more angular shape to the profile. She was in sooth a revolting object—a shocking caricature of "the human form divine,"—one of those hideous hags in

whose presence it is impossible to feel otherwise than a sensation of mingled disgust, aversion, and fear. Her eyes seemed to shine with a reptile-light: there was something of horrible sardonism blended with maniac wildness in the expression of her features; —and her voice was shrill in some of its accents and guttural in others.

"Ah! who are you?" she had demanded, gazing up from her own stunted form at the tall stature of the disguised young nobleman. "A wanderer like myself—but not quite a beggar like me, though:" —and then she laughed horribly.

"What are you doing here?" inquired Lord Harold, who could not help thinking that there was some meaning in her presence and a certain significancy in her look.

"What am I doing here?" she repeated. "Nightly do my wandering steps bring me to this accursed spot."

"Accursed spot?" echoed Harold, as if the term had something which struck deep into his own conscience. "What mean you?"

"I mean," responded the hag, "that over where you are now standing, three human forms have swung in chains: on the very ground where your feet rest, was their victim's blood poured out;—and underneath your feet, were the rotting and blackened remains of the three murderers buried, when the gibbet broke and they fell rattling in their chains to the ground."

Harold literally groaned as he heard this hideous tale; and all in a moment it seemed as if the gibbet sprang up anew before him—the broken post shot up into a gallows, with its triple arms and its horrible burden of *three*, swayed by the wind, and with the clank of chains above his head. He was appalled: and again did the perspiration break out cold and clammy all over him. Then, the next moment, as his gaze settled upon the repulsive countenance of the hag, it seemed as if her eyes were shining, or rather burning like red-hot coals as they glared out at him from their sockets. That they were unnaturally bright—especially for so old a creature—there could be no doubt: but that his own fevered fancy, worked up to the highest pitch of horror, augmented every circumstance which was thus combining to fill him with dismay, was equally certain.

"Yes—this post," she continued, laying her hand —and a long shrivelled one it was—upon the top of the fragment of wood, which only projected about three feet out of the ground,—"is the remnant of the gibbet which once stood here. Ah! it was a fine finger-post, was it not?"—and again she laughed horribly, with half-cackling half-guttural sounds, to hear which made the very flesh creep upon the bones.

"And what had you to do with the murderers or their victims?" demanded Lord Harold, again recovering somewhat of his fortitude.

"The three murderers were my own three sons," responded the woman: and then her looks became so wildly fierce that it seemed as if she were about to turn into some horrible monster to spring at Lord Harold, to tear or bite him.

"Your sons?" he said, recoiling two or three paces, and again with a sensation of the flesh creeping upon the bones.

"Yes—my three sons," she answered. "Forty years have passed since they were strung up here. I don't mourn for them now: it's too long back—and the feelings that once were in me have turned into the savage hate of a tiger-cat. But I tell you again that always between sunset and sunrise do I come here to croon their dirge. I don't know why I do it: the people in the neighbourhood say I am mad—and perhaps I am. I never come when the moon and the stars are out—but when all is darkness; and sometimes I stay here for hours and hours together, when the gloom rests upon the earth in the long, long nights of winter."

Lord Harold felt a sort of relief on hearing the woman thus half-proclaim herself to be mad: for it seemed to account for that strange and partially significant expression of countenance which it at first struck him she wore. Indeed, now that he had learnt the horrible legend connected with this spot, —and of which he was utterly ignorant when he had appointed it as a *rendezvous* for Chiffin the Cannibal,—he felt a certain comfort even in the companionship of this vile repulsive hag: for he could not have endured to tarry any longer alone in a place whose associations, when united with his own dark troubled thoughts, would have proved absolutely overwhelming.

"And where do you live, my good woman?" asked Harold, for the purpose of keeping her in conversation.

"Live?" she echoed, with biting scorn in her laugh: "did I not tell you I was a wanderer and a beggar? But yet I do live somewhere," she immediately added, as if in obedience to a second thought or a more lucid effort of memory. "Yes—there is a shed hard by, where I stretch my limbs and eat my sorry meal. Ah! it was a smiling cottage once: that was many, many long years ago! And it was my cottage too; and I lived there with my three sons. Three fine tall young men were they, as ever you could wish to see—as tall as you are, and as handsome too: for I can see that *you* are handsome, for all that mass of hair which you have stuck upon your face."

"What do you mean?" demanded Harold, a sudden terror seizing upon him: for the woman's observation appeared to imply that she knew he wore a disguise and that she had not failed to see through it.

"I mean exactly what I say," she answered, with another chuckling, cackling, guttural kind of laugh, which once more turned the blood to ice in his veins and made the flesh creep. "But no matter: I was telling you about myself. Well, I had that smiling cottage once, and those three fine boys. Boys!—they were young men: but in my fondness I called them boys even until the very last. They did that terrible deed—an unfortunate traveller was their victim. The law took them—the law was merciless to them, as they were to that victim: it raised a gibbet—and it strung them up to it. Then I was left all alone. Nobody offered to turn me out of the cottage, even when I could pay no rent: for nobody wanted to live in it. It was too near to the scene of blood: it was the house where the murderers had dwelt. So, gradually it fell into ruin. Window after window tumbled out —the rain and the snow came in—the little bits of furniture rotted away; and at last it was a mere shed with nothing in it. That is my home, if a

home you choose to call it:"—and again she laughed, but now with biting mockery once more.

"But what did you mean," asked Harold, who still wondered why Chiffin came not, and kept throwing uneasy looks in the direction of the road whence he expected to see him emerge,—"what did you mean by your remark just now?"

"Oh! of the hair plastered on your face?" exclaimed the hag; and her reptile eyes glared maliciously. "Don't you think I can see well enough that you wear a disguise? To be sure! Mad as I may be, you can't deceive me—not you indeed!"

"This is ridiculous," said Harold, though in reality he was seriously alarmed: and again he fancied—his evil conscience made him think it—that there was some meaning in her presence there, as well as something significant and deeply mysterious in her words.

"Ah! you think it ridiculous?" she said: "or you pretend to do so—but you don't in your heart. How like you this spot? Is it not a pleasant one to wait about at?—is not this ground which covers the remains of murderers and of the murdered, an agreeable one to tread upon? Ah! if you remained here long, and visited it often and at all seasons, you would picture to yourself the different things that my fancy sometimes suggests. At such a time as this, for instance—when all is blackness around, and the very earth itself seems black—you would think that this spot opened yawningly, and that its darkness sent up four *dark* shapes one after the other—the murdered and his three murderers! Or at another time, when the snow lay thick and deep upon the ground, you would fancy that it became agitated—that it moved—that it grew up into four *white* shapes; and these the shapes of four spectres from the other world—the murdered and his three murderers!"

"Hold!" exclaimed Staunton, seized with unspeakable horror. "Continue not thus! It is frightful to hear you talk in such a manner!"

"Frightful?" echoed the woman: "then does your conscience cause you to be terrified so? Ah! you have not yet told me why you are here. Did you knowingly and spontaneously choose this accursed spot for some dark purpose of your own? did you choose it because in its own terrible associations there is something congenial to what is passing in your mind, or what you are causing to be done? Say—wherefore this disguise?"

Then, as the hag uttered these words, she with her long, bony, withered fingers, clutched the hair of the false beard fastened on with gum to the lower part of the young nobleman's countenance; and with a single wrench she tore it off. The pain it inflicted excited to fury the rage which he felt at this sudden and most unexpected assault: a cry like that of a hyena burst from his lips—his arm was raised in a moment to strike the hag to the ground—but with an extraordinary cat-like nimbleness, she darted aside; and as her horrible cackling, chuckling laugh quivered from out her toothless mouth, she tossed the false beard over the hedge into the adjacent field.

Harold stopped short, transfixed with horror and dismay. A thousand wild and terrific ideas swept through his mind. Who was this hag that seemed to have detected him, or at all events had penetrated his disguise? was she indeed a being of this world? or was she some evil spectre bearing a substantial form? were there such things as witches? in short, what did it all signify? what meant this assemblage of mysteries and horrors through which for the last quarter of an hour he had been hurried, since the first moment he encountered that wretch?

"No, no," she said, "you dare not strike me! If you did, the earth would open at your feet, and my three sons would spring up to immolate you with the chains in which they were hung, and in which too their rotting corpses were buried."

"But I must and will know who you are!" exclaimed Lord Harold, well nigh goaded to madness. "Tell me—for mercy's sake tell me!" he cried, instantaneously adopting a tone of passionate entreaty.

"Shall I tell you who *you* are?" asked the hag, now fearlessly accosting him again: and as she clutched his arm with her shrivelled but lanky fingers, she looked up into his face with a hideous expression of malignity,—saying, "After all, you must confess that this is an appropriate spot for your appointment, Lord Harold Staunton!"

The young nobleman recoiled with increased dismay: he staggered back as if stricken by the sudden blow of a hammer. The terror of his situation was at its height—the horror of his feelings was consummated. His countenance was pale as death—aye, and ghastly as that of the ghastliest corpse. and he gazed upon the hag with feelings that can be better imagined than described.

Suddenly her laugh rang forth again, like the bitter mockery of fiends: and then she said, "Can't you understand that it is your friend Chiffin the Cannibal who has sent me to join you here?"

Lord Harold Staunton naturally clutched with avidity at this interpretation of the hag's presence there, and of the mystery of her knowledge of who he was: but while a feeling of unspeakable relief thus took possession of his mind, he inwardly cursed the folly of Chiffin in sending such a mad woman as his messenger. And then, too, that feeling of relief was almost instantaneously succeeded by one of terrific apprehension: for it now occurred to him that the plot must have failed—that Chiffin must be in some danger—and hence his fear of joining Lord Harold at the place of appointment.

"Where is Chiffin?" he asked hurriedly: "and why did you play me such a malicious trick? why too have you been delaying me here so long with your different tales?——But fool that I am," he muttered to himself, "thus to question a mad woman, and thus to prolong the very delay which has so angered me!"

"Chiffin is in my shed," replied the hag, who seemed to enjoy Lord Harold's vexation and wrath; and her wrinkled countenance was still more shrivelled up into an expression of diabolical malignity. "Yes—he is in my shed—that beautiful place I have described to you——"

"Then let us proceed thither quick!" interrupted Harold, who was a prey to the most frightful suspense: but he suddenly bethought himself that it would be more prudent to regain possession of his huge beard—for he knew not how serviceable that main ingredient of his disguise might possibly prove, and how far Chiffin's failure (for such he feared it to be) would compromise himself.

He was accordingly advancing towards that part of the hedge over which the hag had thrown the beard—when she, divining his intention, burst into so hearty but at the same time so sardonic a fit of merriment, that he became almost furious with rage; and a terrible imprecation burst from his lips.

"It's no use for you to think of getting back that beard of your's," said the hag: "for there's a deep ditch behind the hedge—and into that it has fallen."

"Wretch!" muttered Harold: then seeing how useless it was to vent his rage on the woman, he said, "Come—hasten and lead me to the place where Chiffin is waiting for me."

"This way:"—and the hag at once struck into that very road whence he had been all along expecting to see the Cannibal emerge.

She proceeded at an extraordinary pace, considering her great age, which could scarcely have been less than seventy: and yet it was a sort of hobbling, shambling gait—so that it was a wonder she could get over the ground so fast. Harold followed her close,—his suspense increasing, if possible, and becoming all the more painful the nearer he drew to the place of destination. The walk continued for about half-a-mile; and then, in a small open space by the side of the road, a dilapidated cottage gradually stood out from amidst the obscurity of the hour. But it evidently was not so bad as the hag had represented it: for there was at least one window which had not fallen in—and a light glimmered through it. Harold thought that this could not be the place: but the hag struck out of the road and made straight for the habitation. On this nearer approach, Staunton perceived that it had a door, and that its roof was but partially dilapidated. Indeed, half of the little cottage was alone ruined by the lapse of time; and the other portion was to all appearances perfectly habitable.

"There—walk in," she said, throwing open the door: "and I will leave you alone to settle your affairs with your friend Chiffin."

These last words were uttered with a peculiar irony, which for a moment filled Lord Harold with a vague yet poignant apprehension either of imminent danger, or that the woman was in some way deceiving him. But so desperate was his situation, and so acute his suspense, that he hesitated not for more than a single instant; and crossing the threshold, entered the small and wretched room where the candle was burning. The hag closed the door behind him; and her horrible laugh reached his ears as she hurried away from the place.

But what words can depict the mingled consternation and dismay which seized upon Lord Harold, when instead of finding himself in the presence of Chiffin the Cannibal, he was instantaneously confronted by his uncle the Marquis of Eagledean!

CHAPTER CXXV.

THE UNCLE AND NEPHEW ONCE MORE TOGETHER.

THE tale which the half-maniac hag had told the young nobleman in respect to the dreadful murder committed by her three sons, and their execution on the spot where the dead took place forty years back, was strictly true. It was well known at the time that she herself was perfectly innocent of any complicity in that hideous turpitude; and as the event rendered her half-crazy, she became an object of pity on the part of those who knew her. It was likewise true that she had been permitted to continue in the habitation of that cottage; and she was supported by the charity of persons dwelling in the neighbourhood. She was wont to call at the country-houses round about, and even at some in the town of Tonbridge itself, to receive broken victuals and an occasional cast-off garment, with now and then some alms in the shape of money: and thus she did not starve. Her mind was to a certain extent upset; and she had told no falsehood when she said that during the hours of darkness she was accustomed to visit the spot where her three sons had suffered for their crime, and where they were interred after hanging in chains for some years.

She was known throughout the district as *Crazy Bet;* and if ever, when posted at the fatal spot, she encountered some benighted wayfarer, she was wont to tell him the story of the dread deed in her own peculiar style; and she appeared to feel a malignant pleasure in the horror and affright which she thus inspired in the minds of the timid. In one sense however she was remarkable for a great degree of shrewdness: she could well recollect anything that was told her; and if occasionally entrusted with a message or a letter by those of whose charity she was a recipient, she never failed to execute the commission with scrupulous punctuality and accuracy.

Many years back, before he quitted England on his self-exile to the Continent, the Marquis of Eagledean, when riding about that part of the country, had frequently fallen in with Crazy Bet; and he was invariably accustomed to bestow upon her some proof of his bounteous commiseration. A few days previously to the period of which we are now writing, and when again happening to ride in this direction, he encountered her; and it was a proof of the woman's extraordinary shrewdness and keenness of penetration, notwithstanding her disordered intellects, that she had at once recognised her former benefactor, the Marquis of Eagledean. Thus did she exhibit a power of perception and a strength of memory which not even any of the former friends and acquaintances of the Marquis had shown: for, as the reader has seen, on his return from Italy under the *incognito* of "Mr Gunthorpe," he was so much altered as almost to defy recognition. Yet this crazy creature *had* recognised him; and he was much struck by the occurrence.

When he had issued forth from his mansion after the adventure with Chiffin the Cannibal, he bent his way on foot in the direction of the spot where the cross-roads met, and which had been indicated to him as the trysting-place for that villain with his unworthy nephew. As we have seen, he had taken the precaution of providing himself with pistols, in case Lord Harold should think of consummating a crime which his agent the Cannibal had failed to perpetrate. The Marquis felt assured that Chiffin would keep his word, and not repair to the spot for which the appointment was given,—inasmuch as it was upon this condition that he was to receive the money in America and a future proof

of Lord Eagledean's liberality. The distance was four miles from the Park to that spot; but when three and a half were accomplished, the Marquis found himself close by the hut which he knew to be tenanted by Crazy Bet. At that instant she was issuing forth from her habitation to pay her wonted visit to the spot where her sons were executed; and an idea at once struck Lord Eagledean.

He thought to himself that if he continued his way to encounter his nephew, the latter might either flee precipitately on recognising his uncle instead of the Cannibal—or else might make a sudden attack upon him, in which case he would be compelled to discharge his pistols in his own defence. Now, Lord Eagledean could apprehend no catastrophe more fatal to his own peace of mind than that which might render him the slayer of his nephew; and thus, on beholding Crazy Bet, did the idea strike him to which we have above alluded. It was to the effect that he would employ her as a means to bring his nephew face to face with him inside the hut. He knew that Crazy Bet would accurately perform whatsoever commission he might entrust to her, and that of her own accord she was certain to tell her tale in such a manner that would produce an impression of awful horror upon the mind of Harold. In short, the Marquis, comprehending all the dreadful suspense which Harold was sure to feel, foresaw what would be the emotions excited in his mind by a meeting with that crazy hag,—and he therefore concluded that not merely would Staunton be brought by her into his presence, but that he would come with a soul so thoroughly racked by every horrible feeling as to be susceptible of complete prostration when he should find himself face to face with that uncle whose destruction he had sought to compass. Accordingly, the Marquis of Eagledean gave his directions to the old hag,—telling her just sufficient to enable her to drop certain hints and assertions which could not fail to startle Lord Harold and perplex him most cruelly. The reader has seen how well Crazy Bet acquitted herself of her commission—and how she was enabled to gratify that species of malignity which, as the result of her misfortunes, had become interwoven in her nature,—by tearing off a portion of the young nobleman's disguise. It was also consistent with her habit of representing her own condition to be as deplorable as possible, that she should have somewhat exaggerated the misery of her habitation. Finally, she succeeded in inducing Lord Harold to accompany her; and we have seen how fearful was the consternation which seized upon the guilty young nobleman when he found himself confronted by his uncle.

There, then, they met,—there, in that wretched sordid little room in which there was scarcely an article of furniture; and even the few things that met the eye, were broken and dilapidated:—there, by the light of a dimly flickering candle, did the uncle and the nephew meet face to face. The Marquis wore a stern expression of countenance; and in each hand he held a pistol, the light glimmering upon those weapons and revealing them to the eyes of his graceless nephew. As a matter of course, Harold comprehended all in a moment that his worst fears were realized—that Chiffin had failed, or else had betrayed him—that everything was confessed, and that he stood in the presence of his uncle as one who was stamped with the premeditation of murder. Not for an instant did the wretched criminal think of personally attempting any farther villany on his already too much outraged relative; and after standing for a few moments in ghastly dismay, he sank down on his knees exclaiming, "Pardon me—pardon me!"

"Rise, sir," said the Marquis, in a stern tone: "rise—take your stand as far off as the narrow limits of this place will permit—and listen to what I have to say."

Harold obeyed mechanically, and with a most unfeigned and wretched humiliation. He felt that it was indeed the most miserable moment of his existence, and one scarcely to be envied by a felon in the gaol's condemned cell. He dared not look his uncle in the face: but retreating into the farthest corner, stood with downcast eyes—the picture of abject woe!

"Harold," said the Marquis, still speaking sternly, and still grasping his pistols with the air of a man who did not choose for a moment to be off his guard, and who was resolved to punish on the spot any attempt that might be made upon his life,—"Harold, my presence here is to afford you one more chance of redeeming the past. That your own conscience *must*—if you be at all accessible to the slightest spark of proper feeling—for evermore torture you with remorse on account of this tremendous crime which you have sought to have perpetrated by means of an agent who is already a branded murderer,—is but too certain. But still there is a possibility of future atonement——I hope to God I may say, of sincere penitence! This chance I will give you. Nay, do not interrupt me: do not speak! No words that may now come from your lips, can delude me with the idea that you are already repentant. Such speedy penitence follows not upon a plot so insidiously laid and a crime so coldly deliberated. Years of contrition can alone redeem the past. But now, before my final intentions towards you are made known, answer me a few questions. Before, however, I proceed to put them, let me give you to understand that if even at this moment you still entertain a project of a diabolic character against myself, it were most perilous for you to attempt it. At the slightest hostile movement which you were to make, I would shoot you as remorselessly as I would kill a rabid dog. Moreover, you cannot think that I was so imprudent as to trust myself in the presence of such as you, even though armed with these weapons. If I raise my voice, there are those sufficiently near at hand to rush forward, and either save your uncle or at least capture his assassin."

As the reader knows full well, this assertion on the part of Lord Eagledean was not correct: but he felt it necessary thus completely to overawe and intimidate the mind of his nephew who had already shown such a dreadful aptitude for crime. Harold groaned in the bitterness of his spirit—but said not a word: he was completely discomfited—crushed—broken down.

"Now," continued the Marquis, "the first question I have to put to you, is whether this fiend-like project was initiated by yourself—or whether it was instigated by that she-devil Lady Saxondale? Answer me truly: for I shall be enabled to judge whether you speak with accuracy."

"On my soul," exclaimed Harold, with passionate vehemence, "I should not have thought of it had I not in a fatal moment encountered that detestable woman at Beauvais. I was acting at the time in obedience to your commands—I was following out your instructions to the very letter,—travelling quietly and unostentatiously upon the Continent. I had even halted at Beauvais merely for the purpose of pursuing some recreating sport in the neighbourhood——"

"I understand—and you met Lady Saxondale," interrupted the Marquis of Eagledean: "and she put this execrable project into your head—and she instructed you where to find a fitting instrument for its execution—and more than that, she furnished you with the means of taking life by a prompt and inevitable process. It was *her* bottle of poison which you sought in the room at Saxondale Castle. Is not all this correct?"

"It was so—it was so," ejaculated Harold, literally writhing with the agony of his thoughts.

"And has it never struck you, then," inquired the Marquis, "that Lady Saxondale is perhaps a murderess herself?"

"Ah!"—and Harold gave a sudden start, while his countenance grew more ghastly, if possible, than it was before.

"Yes—I see that the idea has struck you," said Lord Eagledean. "Doubtless you remember with what extraordinary suddenness a domestic in her service—Mabel Stewart, I think was the name I read in the newspapers at the time——"

"Ah!" again ejaculated Harold: but now it was with a certain feeling of relief; for he had fancied that his uncle meant to touch upon another topic. "Yes, yes," he cried, snatching with avidity at this unexpected turn which Lord Eagledean's discourse had thus taken: "I do remember now—but it never struck me before."

"There can be no doubt of it!" said the Marquis. "That woman is a murderess—and for some mysterious reason of her own, she poisoned her dependant. But to her conscience must she be left for punishment: I can see no means of bringing her guilt directly home to her. Now, Harold Staunton, consider the position in which you have placed yourself,—imbibing the instigations of a murderess to become a murderer! Providence has interposed to save you from the commission of this foul deed. The vile tool whom you employed, confessed everything; and for your sake I have not surrendered him up to justice. By this time he is far away from the neighbourhood; and he will go to a foreign land. You also will at once set out for another country: but it is not to France that you shall return;—there must be no opportunity afforded for you to fall in again with that woman who for purposes of evil has obtained such an empire over you. No—it is to Sweden that you shall proceed; and at Stockholm will you fix your residence. There will I cause to be paid quarterly, the income I promised when a few weeks back you went to France. The amount will be periodically handed over to you, on personal application only, at a banker's in Stockholm: the money will not be paid to your written order. Now, Harold, you will lose no time in repairing to London and embarking for Sweden. This last chance do I give you. If you be again heard of or seen in England until such time as I may think fit to authorise your return, I will at once stop the sources of your income, and will take active measures to punish you in a still more serious manner. But that you may not think I threaten vainly, or without the power to carry my menace into execution,—let me remind you that if I were to apply to the Court of Chancery to cut off the entail of the Eagledean estates—and if I were to adduce as a ground for the application, all the incidents of your atrocious conduct and meditated crimes,—let me remind you, I say, that such application would not be in vain, and that you would find yourself in a condition of the most abject pauperism. What then would be your fate? Shunned by the whole world—execrated as a monster who sought to commit the most diabolical of crimes—your very name spoken even by your nearest relatives with loathing and abhorrence—dragging your miserable existence through the odium, the hate, and the disgust of all acquainted with your misdeeds,—without even the possession of wealth to cheer you,—what, I ask, would become of you *then*? But if you faithfully and truly follow out the course which I have laid down, I shall hold your obedience to my will as a progressive atonement for the past. From your aunt and your sister will I keep your wickedness concealed,—so that some years hence, when as an altered man you return to this country, you may still be received with open arms by them."

Lord Harold was about to speak: fervid assurances of implicit obedience to his uncle's will, were on the point of issuing from the lips of the crushed and spirit-broken young nobleman;—but the Marquis waved his hand imperiously to command silence.

"Promise me nothing," he said, still coldly and sternly: "I want proofs — not words. Heaven send that you may appreciate the leniency now shown you! Depart:—I have no more to say. Depart, Harold—and may the incidents of the last few hours operate as a terrible warning and as an efficient example."

Again did the Marquis of Eagledean wave his hand in a peremptory manner; and his miserable nephew slunk away from his presence.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

EDMUND'S BRIDE.

ABOUT five years previous to the date of which we are writing, the whole fashionable world of Paris was suddenly excited by the appearance in that brilliant sphere of a beautiful young English girl, named Adelaide Horton. She was then nineteen years of age, and of a loveliness so transcending as to ravish the hearts and bewilder the imagination of all beholders of the male sex—while the ladies felt even their jealousy triumphed over by the loftier feeling of interest which her presence inspired. She was represented to be an orphan, and came to Paris accompanied by an aunt, who made no pretence of possessing any great means: nor did she hesitate to confess to the acquaintances whom she formed, that her niece was entirely portionless. But for one of such radiant charms a brilliant marriage might be reasonably expected; and no doubt

this was the hope of the aunt, who seemed to be much attached to her young relative.

Adelaide was as accomplished as she was beautiful: her manners were amiable—her disposition appeared to be good—and in her intercourse with the society to which she was at once introduced on her appearance in Paris, her bearing was marked with the most modest propriety. She spoke the French language with all the fluency of a native; and for one of her quick intelligence, it was easy to attain in a comparatively short period, the fashionable Parisian accent.

Adelaide Horton found all the male sex her admirers; and amongst them she had soon several *suitors. At first she appeared to give no encouragement* to any one in particular: but after a while it was whispered that the young and handsome Count de St. Gerard had made an impression on the heart of the English beauty. The aunt was however, with all her attachment for her niece, a worldly-minded woman; and on privately instituting certain inquiries, she ascertained that though the Count was in the present enjoyment of a considerable estate, yet that his possession thereof was the subject of litigation; and that if the decision of the tribunals should be against him, he would be reduced to comparative poverty. It was known therefore by the most intimate friends of the aunt, that she set her face against the attachment which her niece had formed; and in a few weeks the old lady's worldly forethought was justified by the circumstance of a hostile judgment against Count de St. Gerard, and the sudden alienation of *this young nobleman's property. He immediately* quitted Paris; and whether any private interview took place between him and Adelaide Horton, was not known to her aunt and friends.

A very few weeks after this occurrence the

fashionable world of the French capital was startled by the announcement that the beautiful English lady had consented to bestow her hand upon the Baron de Charlemont. This gentleman had served with great distinction in the French army, and had risen to the rank of General. He was rich—but was mutilated with many wounds; and was sixty years of age. He had never been a handsome, nor even a fine man; and a scar upon his face had rendered him even more repulsive than he naturally was. That Adelaide should consent to be sacrificed to such an individual, naturally caused considerable astonishment, even in a sphere where young damsels when portionless were wont to become the wives of men old enough to be their grandfathers. For it was thought that the English tastes and notions of Adelaide would have rendered her averse to such an alliance. However, it was of course set down to the successful manœuvrings of the aunt; and the Baron de Charlemont, though usually a man of reserved habits, and whose only pride seemed to consist in the gallant deeds associated with his name, appeared immensely elated at the triumph he had obtained over the numerous rival competitors for the young lady's hand. It must however be observed that of all these competitors he was decidedly the richest,—though there were men of a loftier rank who were sighing at Adelaide's feet: but then in France, aristocratic titles were held in the time of King Louis-Philippe in much less estimation than the possession of wealth.

Adelaide Horton accompanied the Baron de Charlemont to the altar, and became the mistress of her husband's splendid mansion in the Rue de Tournon. She was twenty when she thus married; and it was consequently four years previously to the date which our tale has properly reached. After her union she mingled in society as usual: her manner was as gay and affable as ever; and people wondered how she could so soon have forgotten the handsome and elegant Count de St. Gerard. For two years did her married life last; and never once did the breath of scandal whisper a syllable against her name. Her conduct was marked by every appearance of the strictest propriety; and this also excited some little degree of surprise on the part of the Parisians,—inasmuch as with a husband of the Baron's age and personal appearance, if she had bestowed her favours upon a lover, she would not have been blamed nor have lost her social position: that is to say, as long as outward decency was not flagrantly violated. But there was not even the faintest suspicion that the Baroness de Charlemont indulged in any such amour. On the contrary, it was very well known that she had rebuked with dignified indignation several overtures that were made to her by the handsome and dissipated youths of the Parisian aristocracy.

Thus did two years pass away after the marriage of Adelaide with the Baron de Charlemont. No issue resulted from the alliance; and we must observe that the aunt resided with her niece and the Baron at the mansion in the Rue de Tournon.

One evening, at the expiration of those two years, a female—poorly clad, and with a thick veil over her countenance—entered the shop of a chemist in an obscure quarter of Paris, and one of the most remote from that in which the Rue de Tournon was situated. Addressing herself to a lad about eighteen—the chemist's son, who was serving behind the counter—she inquired for some prussic acid. The youth questioned her as to the use she intended to make of it,—at the same time representing that the French laws were very stringent against the sale of all poisons, and that it specially behoved him to be cautious in dispensing one of that deadly character. She answered in a firm and collected tone, that her husband was making chemical experiments, and that he required prussic acid for the purpose: she likewise gave a name and address, which the youth wrote down in a book: but still he hesitated, not liking the manner in which she kept the veil over her countenance. She appeared to treat the matter with considerable indifference,—saying that if he disliked to serve her, she would go elsewhere. The chemist was very poor: money was a great object: the youth knew his father's necessities—and acceded to the woman's request. She received the phial of poison, paid the sum demanded, and walked coolly and deliberately out of the shop,—as if conscious of no evil intent, and not caring if she were followed.

Almost immediately after she had quitted the shop, the chemist himself entered from an inner parlour; and his son told him what had taken place. The old man was very angry that the poison had been served,—representing that if any evil consequences ensued, the rigours of the law might be visited upon them both. He instantly demanded in which direction the woman went on leaving the shop?—and the son then recollected (for it had not struck him before) that she proceeded in a contrary way from the address which she had given.

"You would recognise her again?" said the father: "run in pursuit—and if you overtake her, insist upon having the phial back and on returning the money. I will in the meantime speed to the address which she has given: for if it be the correct one, she may have sought it by a circuitous route, having perhaps other purchases to make."

The father and son accordingly sallied forth, each taking a separate direction. The father, on reaching the address indicated, found—as he had already more than half suspected—that no such person was known there; and that no female at all answering the description of the veiled one, had ever been seen at the house. On the other hand, the youth sped rapidly along in the direction which the female had taken; and at the end of a couple of streets he perceived her by the light of the lamps turning round a corner. At the very moment he overtook her, a gust of wind blew aside her veil; and he caught a glimpse of her countenance: but as the veil was instantaneously replaced—and, as he thought, in a hurried and excited manner—that glimpse was of the most transient character. Nevertheless, the impression which at once settled upon his mind, was to the effect that it was a countenance of exceeding beauty, with a mass of light or golden hair gathered up on each side. Nor less did it strike him with the same rapidity, that the female was purposely disguised in that mean attire, and that her distinguished look but ill assorted with such apparel. Catching her by the arm, he said quickly, "Pardon me, madam—but it is necessary I should

speak to you; and if you would avoid scandal and disturbance, I pray you to return quietly to the shop you have so recently left."

The lady had stopped short on being thus clutched and thus addressed: the chemist's son felt by her arm that she was trembling violently—and indeed, veiled though she were, it was evident that her whole form was thus agitated. But quickly recovering herself, she said in a voice that sounded cold and composed, though low, "I live close by. Come with me—and I will do whatsoever you desire."

"But, madam," at once responded the chemist's son, "you are proceeding in a contrary direction to the address which you ere now gave me."

"That is quite true," she rejoined, in the same collected manner: "but I had other purchases to make. I have a friend living close at hand; we will proceed thither: and then you can not only explain yourself, but I will convince you that I am of the highest respectability."

"Madam," replied the youth, "what I require to be done can be accomplished in a single moment. Give me back the phial, and receive your money in return."

"Fool!" suddenly ejaculated the stranger lady, who during this brief and hurried colloquy, had taken something from beneath her shawl with the hand that was disengaged: for the chemist's son still retained a firm grasp on her right wrist: and at the same instant that she uttered that word, some powder was thrown in his eyes, which naturally made him start with the sudden pain.

The lady burst away from him: he shouted for the police, while wiping his eyes with his handkerchief: a crowd soon gathered around him—he gave a hurried description of the female's appearance—and several persons set off in every direction in pursuit. But all attempts to overtake her were unavailing; and meanwhile the young man had been conducted into a house close by, where water was furnished for him to bathe his eyes. It was some innocuous powder that had been thus thrown; and beyond the temporary pain, he experienced no farther annoyance therefrom. On returning home, he recounted to his father all that had occurred; and he then learnt that the address given by the purchaser of the poison, was false. The old chemist deemed it prudent to repair without delay to the Prefect of Police, and narrate the entire particulars; and this functionary consented, under all circumstances, to forbear from instituting any penal proceedings against the chemist's son.

It would appear that the Prefect had not the slightest conception who could be the female that had purchased the poison. He consulted half-a-dozen of his most experienced agents, and those who were best acquainted with the personal appearance of ladies moving in the fashionable sphere: but as a matter of course there were more than one, and more even than fifty, with light or golden air whom these agents recollected in a moment; and it was therefore impossible to fix upon any one in particular. For several days afterwards the chemist's son accompanied one of the agents to all the most fashionable resorts, to see if he could recognise and point out any lady resembling her who had purchased the poison: but this endeavour likewise proved unavailing. Six weeks passed away; and the occurrence ceased to be thought of by the few to whose knowledge it had come. We should however observe that not a single line relative thereto had found its way into the public journals,—so that the female who purchased the poison, might be supposed to have remained unaware of the proceedings thus taken to discover her.

It was in the middle of the night, at the expiration of this interval of six weeks, that the household of the Baron de Charlemont was suddenly alarmed by the violent ringing of the bells communicating with the chamber occupied by that nobleman and his wife. The principal lady's-maid was the first to answer the summons; and she was met on the threshold of the chamber by the Baroness, who seemed in a violent state of agitation, and desired her to hasten and arouse her aunt immediately, as the Baron was seized with apoplexy. Another maid, who immediately after made her appearance, was directed to bid one of the men-servants run instantaneously and fetch medical assistance; for that the Baron appeared to be dying. Both of these maids perceived a strong odour of vinegar and perfume in the chamber; and they of course concluded that the Baroness had been applying restoratives to her husband. The aunt speedily reached the chamber, where she found her niece apparently in a fainting state, and the Baron de Charlemont lying a corpse in the bed. The aunt herself was so dreadfully shocked that for some minutes she required from the female-servants who gathered in the room, as much assistance as her niece. But at length, by the time the medical man arrived, they were both somewhat restored to self-possession. The Baroness seemed to be much affected: but there was nothing so unnaturally frenzied in her grief as to give it the air of being assumed and over-done. On the contrary—as subsequently described by the witnesses thereof—it appeared the natural ebullition of a young wife's feelings, when so rudely and suddenly deprived of a husband who, if he possessed not her love, at all events had gained her esteem and gratitude by his kindness towards her. In short, it was represented to be just that species of affliction which was likely to be shown under circumstances where there could not be any fervid or impassioned love. When sufficiently composed to give an account of the tragedy, the narrative of the Baroness amounted to these particulars:—

On retiring to rest, the Baron had complained of an uneasy feeling and dizziness in the head—a fact corroborated by his valet, who had assisted him to undress in a room adjoining the bedchamber: but after he had sought his couch, he felt somewhat better. In the middle of the night the Baroness, who slept lightly, was awakened by hearing her husband groan: she started up—and by the light burning in the room, perceived that he was in a fit. She instantaneously applied such restoratives as were at hand—or at least which she believed to be calculated to have that effect: and finding that he was rapidly becoming worse, she rang the bells to arouse the household. In the interval, however, between the appearance of the two maids and the coming of her aunt, her husband expired.

The medical man attributed the death to apo-

plexy, of which there was every symptom in the appearance of the corpse; and the proper notification in cases of sudden death was sent to the police, there being no coroner's inquest in France. This notice was forwarded at about nine o'clock in the morning; and on being communicated at the head-quarters of the Prefecture, it immediately struck one of the functionaries there, who was personally acquainted with the Baroness, that she corresponded in stature and in the hue of her hair with the description given by the chemist's son of the female who had purchased the poison six weeks back. The medical man above-mentioned, was instantaneously communicated with; and on hearing what was explained to him, he said that a person being poisoned by prussic acid, would present such an appearance as the corpse of the Baron de Charlemont. It was then ascertained who the undertaker was, to whom instructions were given for the funeral,—these instructions having been already issued, inasmuch as interments are enjoined by the French laws to take place with the least possible delay after death. The undertaker being found, it was arranged that on some pretence he should call at the mansion, as if for farther instructions; and that he should be accompanied by the chemist's son, whom he might introduce as one of his own men. The proceeding was conducted with all this delicacy, so that the feelings of the widowed Baroness might not be wounded in case it should transpire that she was not the purchaser of the poison, and that suspicion was erroneously directed against her.

These matters were all arranged with the characteristic celerity of the French police; and at about noon on the day following the night of the death, the undertaker, accompanied by the chemist's son, was introduced to the presence of the Baroness. She was seated alone in a drawing-room where she had just been giving orders to a milliner for her mourning; and she appeared to be much afflicted. When the undertaker and his companion made their appearance, the latter could not repress an ejaculation as the conviction smote him that this was the lady who had purchased the poison: but the Baroness herself seemed not to recognise him—neither did it appear that she heard the ejaculation which had fallen from his lips, or that she was in the slightest degree troubled at his presence. The undertaker put some questions—received the answer—and withdrew, followed by his companion.

In the immediate neighbourhood of the Rue de Tournon a magistrate was waiting with some *gendarmes*, to act if necessary; and on receiving the information brought by the chemist's son, these officials at once repaired to the mansion. On being introduced to the room where they found the Baroness, she appeared more amazed and indignant than troubled at their presence; and when the magistrate announced to her that he had come to arrest her on the charge of poisoning her husband, she burst into tears, but repelled the accusation with every appearance of outraged innocence. The news spread like wildfire through the spacious mansion: the aunt came rushing half-frantic into the room; and embracing her niece with passionate vehemence, proclaimed her conviction that the charge was as false as it was

aroness besought her relative to compose her feelings, with the assurance that her guiltlessness would soon become apparent.

She was not immediately removed to prison—but merely placed under the strictest *surveillance*, while a surgical examination of the body took place. This was at once proceeded with: it occupied several hours—and the three medical men who performed it, could not agree in their opinion. Two expressed their conviction that the deceased had come by his death by prussic acid; and of these, one was the medical attendant who in the first instance had declared it was apoplexy from natural causes. The third surgeon dissented from the idea of poison, and held that the opinion originally delivered by the attendant of the family, was the correct one. However, the result was that in the evening the Baroness de Charlemont was committed to prison: and the affair excited an immense sensation in the fashionable world of Paris.

Six weeks elapsed before the trial took place; and during this interval the accused Baroness maintained the utmost fortitude, mingled with a grief which appeared perfectly natural, for the loss of her husband and the dreadful crime with which she was charged. Her aunt visited her daily, although she had received such a shock that her health was rapidly giving way. In the meantime the papers of the deceased Baron had been examined; and it was found that he had very recently been speculating largely in mines, which had turned out a complete failure, and in which the bulk of his fortune was swallowed up. From certain entries in a memorandum-book which he kept, it appeared that his wife was cognisant of these speculations and losses; and this circumstance was considered as telling in her favour,—inasmuch as it could not be to possess herself of the sole and absolute control over a large fortune that she had put her husband to death; for the bulk thereof was gone, and the widow's pension to which she would be entitled, was infinitely inferior to his pay as a General in the Army. Therefore, in a pecuniary sense, she was cutting her own throat by making away with her husband.

The day of the trial arrived; and the Court was crowded to excess. The Baroness, apparelled in her widow's weeds, was conducted into the dock by two *gendarmes;* but she was allowed to remain seated during the proceedings. She was exceedingly pale—and therefore all the more interestingly beautiful. For some time after she entered the hall of justice, she remained with her eyes bent downward,—not once throwing a single glance in the direction of the seats filled with so many of her fashionable acquaintances. Her aunt was not present: the excitement and suspense she had hitherto endured, had at length completely prostrated her on a bed of sickness. The King's Procurator opened the proceedings, detailing the facts already known to the reader, and which had tended to accumulate the burden of suspicion upon the head of the prisoner. In speaking of the alleged tragedy itself, the public functionary made use of the following observations:—

"Supposing the charges set out in the indictment to be correct, it is for the imagination to penetrate into that death-chamber, at that deep midnight hour when the deed was accomplished, and to mark step by step the proceedings of the ac-

cused. Thus following the suggestions of conjecture, we may suppose that the fatal poison was dropped between the lips of a sleeping husband, and that vinegar and strong perfumes were profusely poured upon his head and purposely allowed to flow upon the bed-clothes, in order to absorb the strong odour of the prussic acid. Then, this being done, it is easy to conceive how a certain part had to be played, in order to avert suspicion from the guilty heroine of that stupendous tragedy. To put on an air of violent agitation and to ring the bells furiously, were the first expedients which in such a case would be naturally resorted to. Then the accused meets at the threshold those who first hurry in response to that alarming summons. The position of the door prevents these maids from observing that it is an already lifeless corpse which occupies the bed:—they are made to believe that the Baron still lives—they are sent on separate errands—a few minutes elapse before the aunt reaches the chamber—by this time the part of the accused is sufficiently played—it is no longer necessary for her to conceal that all is over. Ah, gentlemen of the jury, I fear that all was over many minutes before that aunt's presence there,—that all was over when the fatal drop of poison was placed upon the tongue of a victim who thus suddenly passed from the sleep of life into that which death forbids from waking. But you will be told, gentlemen of the jury, that the grief of the Baroness was too natural to be assumed—that her manner, when arrested, was that of an innocent person outraged by a charge as erroneous as it was foul—and that her demeanour during the period of her captivity, has been all consistent with this conscious guiltlessness. You are not to be led away by these representations. The human mind is of many varieties; and there are some which, endowed with extraordinary strength, as well as being subjected to the control of a powerful will, may be regulated and made pliant to suit all circumstances. Such a mind as this may enable its possessor to play on a particular part until the end. A manifestation of fortitude is no more an evidence of outraged innocence, than a complete sinking into despondency should be taken as a proof of guilt. Some minds sustain themselves boldly throughout a career of crime: while others, really innocent, sink crushed and broken beneath the slightest imputation of guilt. Then, too, gentlemen of the jury, you will be told that the accused had no earthly reason for committing such a crime—that by the death of her husband she frustrated the chance of his shattered fortunes being retrieved—and that she reduced herself to comparative poverty on a widow's pension, whereas, had he lived, she might still have shared the liberal revenue enjoyed by a General-officer. You will be told, too, that her conduct as a woman and a wife has been unexceptionable—that the breath of suspicion has never tainted her fame—and that it could not therefore be to enjoy without restraint the embraces of a paramour, she had been led to the perpetration of such a crime. But it is not for you to set yourselves up as judges of motives: you have to decide upon the evidence of facts. How many secret springs are there in the human mind, which remain concealed from general observation, and which it is impossible to fathom! How many incidents have we on record of great deeds of turpitude—known and unmistakably proven—which were committed without any apparent motive! But perhaps, when the presiding judge shall interrogate the prisoner, it may transpire that she had a motive—or at least *a hope*, in doing this deed,—supposing, according to the terms of the indictment, that she did really perpetrate it. There are incidents where first affections have been blighted—where a marriage has taken place with another than with him whose image filled the heart—and where the husband has been immolated in the hope that after due time a second marriage may put that heart in possession of its long-cherished object. I do not say that such is the case in the present instance: but I believe that I am not altogether without a justifiable ground for making the allusions just spoken."

The speech of the King's Procurator, which lasted four hours, produced an immense sensation in the Court; and many who had come thither in the belief of the Baroness de Charlemont's innocence, had their faith considerably shaken: while others, still more easily led away by the power of forensic oratory, were turned altogether against her. Whatsoever emotions were passing in her mind, could not be conjectured by the audience generally; inasmuch as throughout the Procurator's address she kept her eyes bent down, and her features were thus concealed by the front of the dock. But now came the interrogatory of the prisoner by the presiding judge—a feature in French criminal proceedings totally unknown to our English tribunals. The Baroness stood up: not a single glance did she turn towards the auditory: her eyes were fixed on the judicial bench. Her demeanour was firm and collected—but her cheeks were pale; and indeed it was impossible that she could have done otherwise than feel much inwardly: for it was a matter of life or death to her—and that death, if pronounced as her doom, to be inflicted by the guillotine!

The President proceeded to question her in the usual manner,—first of all inquiring her age and maiden name, the country to which she belonged, and the date of her marriage. He then asked whether she were acquainted with a certain Count de St. Gerard? When this question was put, a breathless silence reigned on the part of the auditory: the deepest suspense prevailed. A few moments elapsed before the Baroness answered the query; and then she replied in the affirmative. The President next inquired whether she had not at one time experienced a certain affection for that young nobleman? To this demand an affirmative response was likewise given; and now the voice of the Baroness trembled audibly. She was asked under what circumstances she was led to marry the Baron de Charlemont, when her heart inclined towards another?

"I was poor—and the Baron was rich," answered Adelaide, her voice again trembling, and now with a still more visible emotion. "My aunt, to whom I was under the utmost obligations, was likewise poor. I should have made no sacrifice of the feelings to procure the enjoyment of riches for myself: but I was prepared to make every sacrifice on account of my aunt"

"Then you consider that you were making a sacrifice," inquired the President, "by espousing the Baron de Charlemont?"

"Should I be believed," exclaimed Adelaide, with much emotion, "if I were to assert the contrary? No—it would be against nature! I did consider it a sacrifice; and the world must have regarded me as a victim. But I accepted my destiny; and when I once became the wife of an honourable man, I resolved to fulfil my duties faithfully. Nay—I can scarcely say that I resolved; because *that* would be to imply that I had deliberated upon the subject—and to deliberate would have been to waver. What I mean is, that when I once entered the marriage-state, I accepted all its holiest obligations; and the prosecuting counsel has done me the justice to admit that I never have been accused of violating them."

This speech, brief though it were, was very effective, and produced a reaction of opinion on behalf of the accused. Perhaps too, her exquisite beauty, which was set off at the moment by the re-appearance of the flushing roses upon her cheeks, helped to create that renewed sympathy: at least it was so with the male portion of the auditory.

"Now, Adelaide Horton," said the President,—for in France the prisoner under such circumstances would be addressed by her maiden name,—"answer me this question: how long is it since you saw the Count de St. Gerard?"

"Some weeks previously to my marriage with the Baron de Charlemont," replied the accused, "I beheld the Count de St. Gerard for the last time."

Here the counsel engaged for Adelaide's defence, rose and addressing the tribunal consisting of three judges, said, "Gentlemen, anticipating that such a question would be put, we have taken pains to procure evidence to the effect that the Count de St. Gerard has not set foot in Paris—nor has he indeed been within fifty leagues of the capital—for upwards of two years past. Here is an affidavit to that effect, made by the Count de St. Gerard, and attested before the proper authorities at Strasbourg."

The paper being duly handed in, the interrogatory was resumed,—the President now asking the Baroness whether she had purchased poison at the chemist's house—whether she had ever disguised herself in mean apparel unbecoming her station—whether she had ever seen the chemist's son previous to the occasion on which he presented himself at her mansion in company with the undertaker?—to all which questions Adelaide replied firmly in the negative.

"I have now," said the President, "but one more question to ask—and it is an important one. The indictment specifies that at nine o'clock in the evening of the 20th of August, 1842, you visited the chemist's house under certain circumstances. If this be the case, you must have been away from your own home for at least an hour. The question I have to ask is this—What were you doing with yourself on that particular evening from nine to ten o'clock? and can you prove how you passed that interval?"

"I dined with my deceased husband and my aunt," responded Adelaide, "at seven o'clock. At eight we retired to the drawing-room. Soon afterwards I was seized with a violent headache, and retired to my own chamber, where I lay down and fell into a deep sleep. At about half-past ten I was aroused by one of the maids, who entered to see if I required anything."

The President had no farther question to put; and it was evident that the response to this last query was deemed unsatisfactory by the audience,—the tide of suspicion once more setting in strongly against the Baroness de Charlemont. As to what the judges and the jury thought of the matter, it was impossible to glean from their grave and unchanging countenances. The trial was suspended for half-an-hour, during which interval the prisoner was transferred to a private apartment in the Palace of Justice; and when the proceedings were resumed, the examination of the witnesses for the prosecution commenced.

The chemist's son was the first thus called upon; and he recited the facts already known to the reader: but when cross-examined, he admitted that during the six weeks which had elapsed since the Baroness was taken into custody, he had on three or four occasions said to his father, "Good heavens! what if after all I should be mistaken as to the identity of this lady with the woman who purchased the poison? I should be the means of sending an innocent being to the scaffold!" Nevertheless, when re-examined by the Royal Procurator, he affirmed his belief that the prisoner in the dock was really and truly the same who had purchased the poison; and he attributed his occasional waverings to a certain nervous excitement which all these extraordinary proceedings had produced. His father was the second witness examined: but all that he had to depose, was the circumstance of making an inquiry at the address given by the female who purchased the poison, and finding that address to be a false one.

The third witness called for the prosecution, was the principal lady's-maid of the Baroness de Charlemont. She deposed that on the evening already particularized as to date, she perfectly well recollected the prisoner ascending to her own chamber a little before nine o'clock, and complaining to the witness, who was in that chamber at the time, of a very severe headache. The Baroness said she should lie down and endeavour to sleep: whereupon the witness withdrew. Some little time afterwards—it might have been perhaps an hour—witness again ascended to the chamber-door, and knocked, thinking that possibly her mistress might require something. No answer was returned: she tried the handle of the door—but found that it was locked inside; and therefore concluding that her ladyship was sleeping, she retired. Adjoining that chamber was the Baron's dressing-room, which communicated with another chamber, known as the Baron's private apartment; and this had likewise a door opening into a passage, whence a private staircase led down into a small garden; and from this garden there was a back entrance into the Rue de Grenelle, which is behind the Rue de Tournon, running parallel with it. The witness did not however endeavour to penetrate into her mistress's chamber by passing through that already described as the Baron's private apartment: she could not therefore say whether the door of this private apartment was also locked. At about half-past ten or a quarter to eleven on the night in question, she ascended again to her mistress's chamber she knocked—and in a few moments the door

was unlocked. The Baroness appeared to have just wakened up from slumber; and she had on precisely the same dress in which she had dined. When cross-examined, the lady's-maid deposed that she had never seen any apparel of a mean nature, or which could serve as a disguise, in the possession of the Baroness: but there were several drawers which the Baroness was wont to keep locked, and to which she (witness) had not access.

This same witness and another maid were examined as to the manner in which they were summoned by the violent ringing of the bell on the night in question; and when cross-examined, they both declared that the grief of their mistress appeared most natural,—not violent nor over-strained—but just such a kind of sorrow as under the circumstances she might have been supposed to experience; and they had not the faintest suspicion of foul play until the arrest took place, this circumstance striking them with the suddenness of a thunder-clap.

The deposition made by the aunt, and taken down by the examining magistrate when the case was first brought before him, was read by the clerk of the court; and it testified to facts already known to the reader. Then followed the examination of the three surgical witnesses. Two of them persevered in their opinion that death had been produced by prussic acid: the third still held to a contrary belief. This was one of the most interesting portions of the remarkable trial, and occupied some time.

Then began the speech for the defence, one of the most able advocates of the French bar having been retained for the Baroness de Charlemont. He dwelt with emphasis and eloquence upon all the salient points that told in her favour—the absence of any possible motive for the perpetration of such a crime—the positive injury which she would have done herself in a pecuniary sense by removing the husband on whose life depended so large a portion of the revenue she enjoyed in common with him—the fact that the chemist's son had so frequently expressed his dread lest he should have been mistaken in a matter of personal identity—the non-discovery of those articles of mean clothing which she was represented to have worn, and the difficulty of having disposed of such raiment during the short interval between her return from the chemist's (as charged in the indictment) and the ransacking of all her drawers and boxes by the police immediately after the arrest. The learned counsel animadverted strongly upon the attempt of the Royal Procurator to create the impression that a murder of a husband had been committed in the hope that the way would thus be cleared for marriage with the object of the prisoner's first affections. He insisted that it was an important circumstance in the prisoner's favour that she had never seen the Count de St. Gerard, nor communicated with him, since her marriage,—as proved by that nobleman's affidavit. In respect to the endeavour on the part of the prosecution to show that the prisoner could not prove how she had disposed of her time from nine o'clock until half-past ten on the night in question, that endeavour had completely failed: for the inference to be drawn from the testimony of the principal lady's-maid, was that her mistress, having locked herself in her chamber to prevent intrusion, had slept during the whole time. The learned counsel then proceeded to dissect with much skill the surgical evidence which had been tendered—insisting that it was not even satisfactorily shown that the Baron de Charlemont was murdered at all; and that as there was clearly a doubt upon this point, the prisoner was entitled to the benefit thereof. He concluded a long and eloquent speech by calling upon the jury to acquit the Baroness, and relieve her from an imputation which could not be possibly sustained.

Three or four witnesses for the defence were called. One was the magistrate who had effected the arrest, and who frankly admitted that the conduct of the prisoner on the occasion was unlike that of a guilty person. He also deposed to having instituted the most rigorous search throughout the mansion and the garden—but that he had neither discovered the phial which was alleged to have been sold by the chemist, nor any article of the humble raiment which the purchaser of the poison was described to have worn. The gaol authorities were examined, and they spoke to the demeanour of the Baroness during the six weeks of her imprisonment. Some of the late Baron's papers were put in to show that his wife was acquainted with his pecuniary circumstances, and therefore knew what would be the consequence, in this respect, of making away with him. It was likewise shown on the testimony of the valet, that the Baron had complained of illness ere retiring to rest on the night of his death.

The King's Procurator rose to reply, and briefly repeated many of his former arguments, as well as answering those of the counsel for the defence. When he had concluded, the Judges retired to deliberate upon the summing-up; and after an absence of nearly an hour from the court, they returned—when the President delivered his address to the Jury. He was an upright and conscientious Judge, and carefully avoided suffering the Jury to perceive what was the impression of the bench. He pointed out all the facts that told for or against the prisoner; and though the summing-up was perfectly impartial, yet from the analyzation of the circumstances themselves it might be pronounced more favourable than otherwise to the Baroness.

The President ceased; and the jury withdrew to deliberate. It was now eight o'clock in the evening—the lamps were lighted in the court—a profound silence reigned. The auditory, amongst which were so many of the fashionable world of Paris, had remained in the judgment-hall the whole day, so intense was the interest excited by this remarkable trial. A careful study of the most expressive countenances would have shown that the general opinion was adverse to the Baroness de Charlemont—but yet that the jury could scarcely convict upon the evidence as it stood. And she—the accused — that beautiful creature of only twenty-two years of age — apparelled in her widow's-weeds,—there she sat in the ignominious dock, her countenance concealed from the general view. But every one knew full well that powerful emotions must be agitating in her bosom, and that she must feel that her life depended upon the *fiat* about to be pronounced by a majority of the twelve men who had retired from the jury-box.

At length the door behind that box opened: one

by one the jury reappeared, each resuming his seat with a solemn gravity of countenance;—and yet there was something in the looks of several which enabled keen physiognomists to conjecture what the verdict would be. All uncertainty on the subject was soon at an end: the decision was in favour of the Baroness de Charlemont, who was accordingly pronounced *not guilty*.

No applause followed this verdict: though every one present felt it was a decision rendered on the safe side, yet it seemed unsatisfactory. None of Adelaide's brilliant acquaintances stepped forward to grasp her hand and offer congratulations. One individual alone addressed her thus; and that was her own counsel. She sat for nearly a minute in the dock after the verdict was delivered: she sat as if turned into a statue! Then she rose slowly; and without turning a single look upon the audience, as slowly quitted the court.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

THE BRIDEGROOM AND BRIDE.

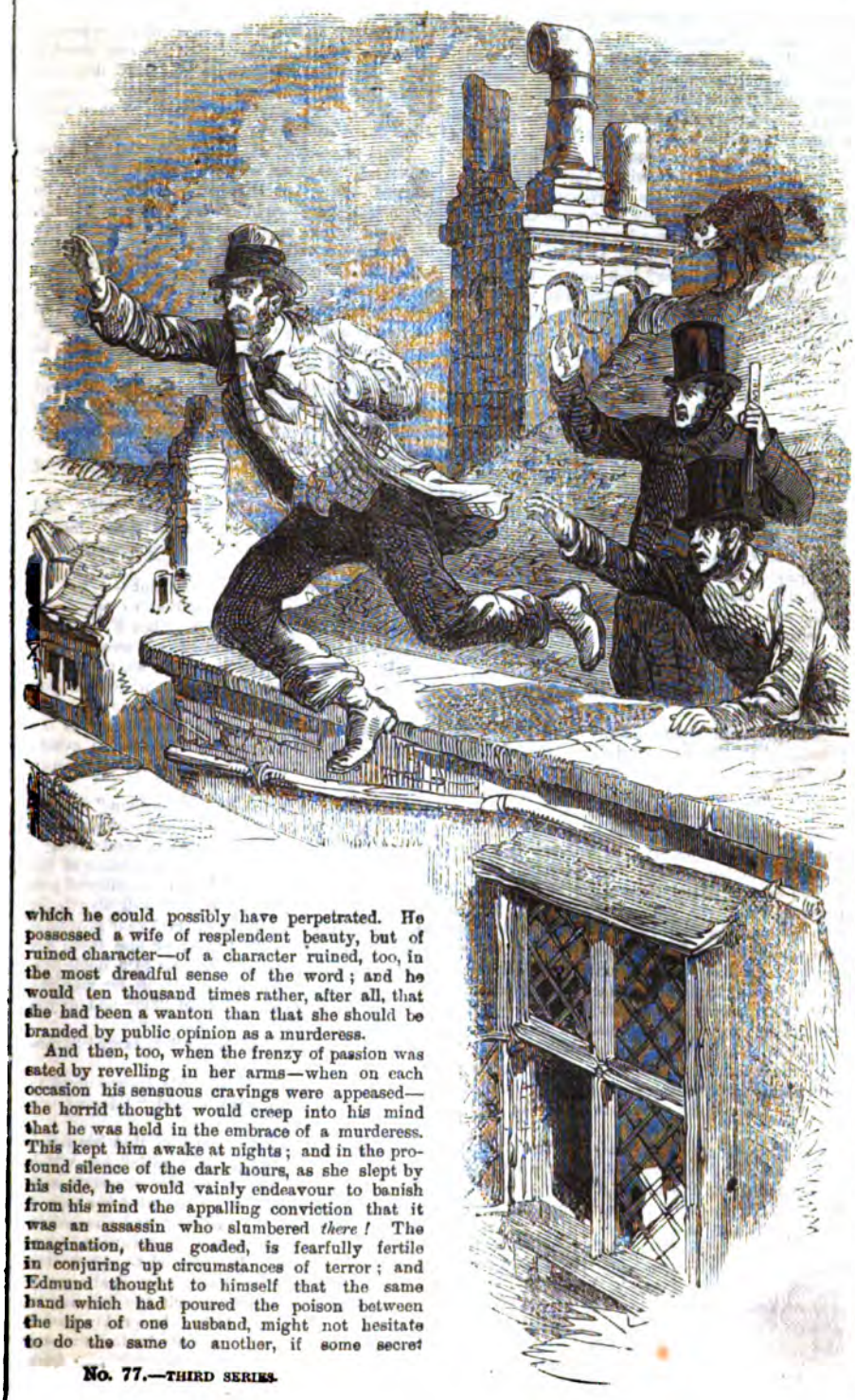
The reader will recollect that it was immediately after the bridal ceremony in the church of St. George's, Hanover Square, that Lord Saxondale learnt from his valet that the Baroness had been tried for the murder of her husband. Terrific was the shock which the young nobleman experienced at this intelligence: he became pale as death, and staggered against the wall for support. The astounding folly which he had committed struck him like a tremendous blow; and when he began to recover his self-possession, the direst alarms sprang up in his mind at the thought of having espoused such a woman.

But how was he to act? It was done—and could not be undone. He felt frightened at her; and he thought to himself that it was absolutely necessary he should veil his feelings and put upon the transaction the best face possible. A perfect adept in dissimulation, he had little difficulty in thus masking the emotions which had been so suddenly and terribly excited within him: and on returning into the vestry where he had left his bride, the radiant beauty of her person mitigated considerably the first feelings of horror and alarm which had seized upon him. The proper entries being made in the register, Lord Saxondale conducted forth his bride to the carriage; and they proceeded to the mansion in Park Lane. There they were received by the assembled domestics, who, as yet ignorant of the lady's antecedents, wore an expression of countenance indicative of tacit and respectful congratulation.

Several days passed; and in the meantime Lord Saxondale had read the whole particulars of Adelaide's trial in a file of English newspapers, to which he referred for the purpose. The account was precisely that which we have given in the preceding chapter; and a paragraph, subsequently published, contained the intelligence of the death of the Baroness de Charlemont's aunt, who expired a few days after that trial. And what was the impression which the perusal of this remarkable case made upon the young bridegroom's mind? Vainly did he endeavour to persuade himself that Adelaide was innocent: he could not succeed:—at the bottom of his soul rested the dark, the terrible conviction that she was really guilty and that he had married a murderess! Yet again and again did he say to himself, "No, it is impossible: she is innocent!"—and again and again did he find himself yielding to quite the opposite conviction. But when in her presence—when under the influence of her sensuous witcheries and voluptuous blandishments—he at first fell into that sort of reckless devil-me-care mood which seemed to say, "Well, never mind—it can't be helped—she won't poison *me*! She is a magnificent creature; and it was worth any sacrifice to possess her."

A fortnight passed; and not a single visit was paid at Saxondale House: it was quite evident that the fashionable world of the British metropolis intended to treat the new Lady Saxondale as she had been treated in France when presenting herself at the ball at the Odeon Theatre. But she said not a word upon the subject to her husband: she did not seem to be annoyed—she appeared as if she were unconscious that such studied and complete neglect was demonstrated towards her. The domestics of the household had gradually grown cool—some sullen and sulky—others half-inclined to show what they thought; and several gave warning to leave at the expiration of a certain term. When these notices were mentioned to Adelaide by the steward and the housekeeper, she made no remark beyond bidding them get other servants; and she asked no questions. It seemed quite sufficient for her that she had become Lady Saxondale, and she troubled not herself about any other circumstance.

Edmund was astonished that neither Lord Petersfield on the one hand, nor Marlow and Malton on the other, had taken the slightest notice of his marriage. They came not near him: neither did they write; and he carefully avoided the chance of falling in with them—for if he did, it would be impossible to help touching on the subject which he felt was no pleasant one whereof to attempt the justification. His mother too continued silent for the fortnight which thus elapsed from the day of his marriage. During this interval he had remained almost entirely at home, save when visiting his club for the purpose of consulting the file of newspapers. He had then noticed that those acquaintances whom he met there, bowed most distantly and coldly—some scarcely at all; and as day after day passed, and not a single carriage rolled up to the door of Saxondale House—not one double knock was heard—he could not shut his eyes to the fact that he and his wife were completely cut. This was by no means agreeable to a vain and conceited young man, whose ambition it was to make himself conspicuous in society. The reader will remember that one of his principal motives for going abroad was on account of the coldness demonstrated towards him by his acquaintances in London; and he had hoped that by accepting the post of *attaché* to an Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, he should acquire a certain importance which, on his return to England, would turn the coldness of his acquaintances into parasitical eagerness to court him. But this hope was now utterly destroyed; and he could not blind himself to the fact that he had committed the most egregious act of folly



which he could possibly have perpetrated. He possessed a wife of resplendent beauty, but of ruined character—of a character ruined, too, in the most dreadful sense of the word; and he would ten thousand times rather, after all, that she had been a wanton than that she should be branded by public opinion as a murderess.

And then, too, when the frenzy of passion was sated by revelling in her arms—when on each occasion his sensuous cravings were appeased—the horrid thought would creep into his mind that he was held in the embrace of a murderess. This kept him awake at nights; and in the profound silence of the dark hours, as she slept by his side, he would vainly endeavour to banish from his mind the appalling conviction that it was an assassin who slumbered *there!* The imagination, thus goaded, is fearfully fertile in conjuring up circumstances of terror; and Edmund thought to himself that the same hand which had poured the poison between the lips of one husband, might not hesitate to do the same to another, if some secret

purpose were to be answered thereby. And then that Count de St. Gerard too—Edmund liked not the name: it became one of the phantoms that haunted him—and he thought that if this individual should appear upon the scene and renew his acquaintance with Adelaide, she might dispose of her bridegroom to make way for the possession of a third husband in the person of him whom, in a court of justice, she confessed to have loved.

Thus was it that even within the first fortnight of this most inauspicious marriage, young Lord Saxondale was led bitterly to repent the step he had taken. But how was he to extricate himself from the meshes which he had allowed to be woven around his limbs? how was he to fling off the coil which an almost incredible infatuation had fastened upon him? He could not: he was afraid of that woman whom he had married—he shuddered and he trembled at the awful capacity for mischief which he believed to be possessed by his bride. And it was this very terror in which he stood of her that made him exercise all his powers to veil the real condition of his feelings,—so that he studied his best to multiply all possible assiduities and attentions towards her whom he had made Lady Saxondale. He was growing desperate;—and yet, an arrant coward in every possible respect, he dared not take any decisive step. He endeavoured to drown his thoughts in champagne, and also in the luxuriousness of Adelaide's charms: but there was gall mingled in the wine-cup—and when his passion was sated by sensuous enjoyment, he felt as if the splendid creature whom he held glowing and palpitating in his embrace, might all in a moment turn into a loathsome reptile and fasten its venomous fangs upon him.

A fortnight thus passed away; and at the expiration of this interval, Lord Saxondale found that his funds were exhausted and that he required money. As yet no conversation had taken place between himself and his bride as to her own pecuniary resources: but from the statement which he had read in the newspaper, he believed that these were of a limited nature. Still he thought it was as well to understand exactly the amount of the revenue which she did possess; and as he felt sure the house in Paris belonged to her, he thought that it might as well be disposed of, as they were by no means likely to need such an establishment in the French capital, inasmuch as Adelaide had vowed that she would never revisit that city again. He did not exactly know how to introduce the subject to his wife, of whom, as already stated, he stood much in terror: but one morning, while they were seated at breakfast, a remark which he made at once turned the discourse into the desired channel.

"I am going presently," he said, "upon a somewhat unpleasant business. It is necessary that I should call on old Petersfield, to obtain some money from him, as my own is exhausted and my regular allowance is not yet due."

"Ah! I am glad, Edmund," responded his wife, "that you have spoken upon the subject: for I myself am in need of money. I want new dresses, various articles of jewellery, and a thousand little things, which I must purchase at my leisure. By the bye, my dear," she went on to observe, "I have not as yet made you acquainted with the precise nature of my affairs: but it is requisite I should now do so. I am well aware," she added, with a peculiar look, in which for a moment there seemed to flash a glance of irony, "that you only married me for myself alone—because you were doubtless aware that my pecuniary means were not large; and by the circumstance of marriage they have disappeared altogether."

"Oh! of course," exclaimed Edmund, "I know that you lose your widow's pension by having married again: but that house in Paris must be worth something—eight or ten thousand pounds, I should think, at the very least;—and as my allowance was well enough for a single man, but will not go a great way to support us both in a proper manner, I was thinking that till I am of age and become the master of my fortune, it will be just as well if we were to dispose of that house, the furniture, and equipages. It could be done in a few weeks——"

"No doubt," answered his wife, with the most perfect suavity of tone and a complete ease of manner; "there would not be the slightest difficulty if the house belonged to me."

"Belonged to you!" echoed Saxondale. "I thought you told me it was your own?"

"To be sure!—and I told you truly," said Adelaide. "You do not, I hope, think that I would deceive you?" she demanded somewhat indignantly.

"Oh, no! not for a moment! But——"

"Perhaps I might have omitted to mention a little fact," continued Adelaide; "but if so, it was because all my thoughts and feelings were so completely absorbed by the love with which you inspired me. However, I must now inform you that by a provision of my late husband's will——"

Edmund could not help shuddering as he thought that this husband to whom she so calmly alluded, had been sent out of the world by her own criminal hand.

"The mansion in the Rue de Tournon," she continued, in the same placid voice and manner, "was to pass away from me, in case of contracting a second marriage, to a distant male relative of the late Baron. But of course this is a matter of perfect indifference to you,—as you will shortly be immensely rich; and in the interval your guardians must supply you with funds: or else there are plenty of means by which the heir to a noble property can raise as much money as he requires. You had better go and see Lord Petersfield, as you just now suggested."

"Yes—I think I had better," answered Saxondale.

Rising from the breakfast-table, he was about to leave the room, when his wife said, "Edmund, one word before you go."

He turned—and now perceived that her countenance wore a very peculiar expression, which made him afraid. It had for the moment a look so sinister, that deeply as he suspected her soul of conscious guilt, he was surprised and shocked to behold that expression upon a countenance so transcendently beautiful. It appeared to reflect dark and malignant passions: and yet he could scarcely explain more definitely to himself the meaning to be gathered from that look. It quickly passed away, leaving an angelic serenity behind it:—and beckoning him towards her, Adelaide rose from

her seat—placed her hand upon his shoulder—and thus leaning lightly upon him, gazed tenderly in his face, as she said, "Lord Petersfield will doubtless indulge in many bitter invectives against me: it is for you, as my husband, to defend me."

"Defend you!" stammered Saxondale, who was afraid of suffering his wife to know how well he was acquainted with all the particulars of her trial in Paris two years back.

"Yes, Edmund—defend and vindicate me!" she said emphatically: and now he felt her hand grasp his shoulder for a moment with a sudden spasmodic violence. "You must not think that I am ignorant of what is uppermost in your mind: I am well aware that you know all the past as it relates to me: and I thank you, my Edmund, for having with so much delicacy abstained from alluding to it. The charge was most odious—most foully false. You can conceive the pain and anguish it occasions me to be compelled thus to allude to it. Not for a moment must *you*, Edmund, believe that I was guilty! No—if the world has been unjust towards me, it is for you as my husband to make me the fullest amends by your kindness and your confidence. Go you, therefore, to Lord Petersfield—tell him that you are convinced of my entire innocence of the dreadful accusation levelled against me—and represent to him that if he be a man of justice and honour, of mercy and of humanity, he will adopt the same view. And now go."

Thus speaking, Adelaide threw her arms around her husband's neck—imprinted a long and sensuous kiss upon his lips—and sent him forth with ecstacy thrilling through his form, but with bewilderment in his brain. Was she indeed innocent? could it be possible? Ah! what would he not give to be enabled to believe her so! And again he tried—again he strove, to clutch that belief: but he could not!—a secret voice in the depths of his soul whispered that she was really guilty.

He proceeded on foot towards Lord Petersfield's residence: but while repairing thither, he deliberated whether he should have recourse to his guardian, or whether he should raise a loan from the money-lender who was recommended by Emily Archer, and who had before accommodated him. As we have already stated, he had hitherto sedulously avoided the chance of falling in with Lord Petersfield: but he did not like the silence which that nobleman, Marlow and Malton, and his mother had hitherto maintained in respect to his marriage. He could not help fearing that some mischief was brewing; and yet he knew not what. He was nervous and uneasy: his mind was filled with vague apprehensions of impending evil: he longed to see Petersfield for one reason, yet dreaded to meet him for another. While thus hesitating and deliberating, he arrived within sight of the house where his lordship dwelt. He looked at his watch to see whether it were yet too early to present himself there: but finding that it was eleven o'clock, he resolved to put as bold a face upon the matter as possible, and see his guardian. He accordingly knocked at the door: the summons was at once answered by a footman; and at the same instant Edmund caught sight of Lord Petersfield passing into a room at the extremity of the spacious hall.

"Oh, I see his lordship is at home," observed Edmund, assuming as off-hand and self-possessed a manner as possible: and he was about to cross the threshold.

"No, my lord—his lordship is *not* at home," responded the domestic, with marked emphasis.

"You lying scoundrel!" ejaculated Edmund, becoming crimson with mingled rage and mortification. "I saw your master enter the dining-room yonder."

"I don't care what you saw," responded the footman doggedly and even insolently. "I tell you he is *not* at home."

For an instant Edmund was inclined to turn away: but thinking that it would be quite safe to give vent to his ill-temper by bullying the lacquey, he exclaimed, "You impertinent scoundrel, how can you stand there, looking me in the face, and telling such an infernal falsehood?"

"Scoundrel!" echoed the man: "who do you call a scoundrel? At all events my wife is an honest woman—and not a murderess."

With these words he banged the door in the face of Lord Saxondale, who stood upon the steps livid and trembling with rage. So violent were his feelings that he could have screamed out—he could have dashed himself against the door—he could have torn it with his nails: but people were passing at the time, and he felt that he was already sufficiently mortified—nay, crushed and beaten down—to avoid farther exposure. He therefore hurried away; and flinging himself into the first hackney-coach that he perceived, he ordered himself to be driven to the office of Mr. Musters in the City. During the drive thither, Edmund's reflections were of the most painful nature. Already cut by the entire fashionable world—looked coldly upon, or scarcely spoken to, by his acquaintances—denied admittance into the house of his own guardian—and insulted by a lacquey,—the possessor of a splendid title, and with enormous revenues in the prospective, was at this instant the most wretched mortal upon the face of the earth. It was therefore in no very pleasant frame of mind that he was set down at the office of the money-lender: but again putting on the best possible face, he said to himself, as he ascended the dark dingy staircase, "At all events, old Musters won't care who I have married; and as he has been paid once, he will be ready enough to lend me money again."

In the front office a wretched starveling boy was writing at a desk; and in response to the young nobleman's question, he said that Mr. Musters was alone and disengaged. Edmund accordingly passed into the back-room which the money-lender made his private office, and where he was now seated at a desk covered with papers. He was a little old man, looking as if he had been completely shrivelled up, without being actually scorched, by the ordeal of some intense process of heat: his countenance had something vile and mean, as well as sharp and cunning, in its expression: he was dressed in a suit of rusty black—his linen was none of the cleanest—and by his personal appearance he rather resembled a decayed tradesman or broken-down undertaker, than a man who, if he chose, could write his name to a cheque for a hundred thousand pounds. Yet such was the case: for during a long series of years, Musters had been amassing wealth by every variety of usurious, dirty, and dishonest expedient,—taking

care, however, in all his proceedings, to avoid entangling himself with the criminal law. If his form appeared to have been shrivelled up in the close and heated atmosphere of a City-office, his soul was assuredly tanned, and parched, and indurated, so as to be perfectly inaccessible to every generous or proper feeling: it was hardened to all the amenities of life, and susceptible only of ideas connected with sordid gain.

"Well," cried Saxondale, adopting an air of flippant gaiety, which he was ever wont to mistake for well-bred ease, as he entered into the usurer's presence,—"I am come to see you again:"—and he flung himself upon a seat with an air of dissipated languor.

"What has procured me the honour of your lordship's visit?" inquired Musters: and it struck Edmund that his manner was cold and distant.

"I want you to write me a cheque for fifteen hundred, or so," he responded; "and you shall have my promissory note."

"Very sorry, my lord—but it can't be done," said the old man: and then he compressed his lips with decisive firmness over his toothless gums.

"How do you mean—can't be done?" ejaculated Edmund. "Didn't you but very lately trust me to the amount of four thousand pounds? and didn't Marlow and Malton settle with you?"

"Well, my lord, they settled after a fashion," replied Musters: "they made me strike off a considerable amount."

"Oh, all stuff and nonsense!" cried Edmund: "there was plenty of margin left for your profits, I'll be bound. And then, what's more, you got ready money instead of having to wait till I came of age."

"Yes—but Messrs. Marlow and Malton will not be disposed to settle your lordship's debts again," said the old man, now speaking almost doggedly.

"And if they don't, sha'n't I be of age in eighteen months? and you will of course calculate interest and commission, and all that sort of thing, accordingly. Come, I want fifteen hundred to-day very particular indeed; and I will give you a bill for a couple of thousand."

"I would rather decline, my lord," answered Musters firmly.

"But why? This is not treating me well. I know you have got plenty of money: so there's no excuse of that sort. Come now, there's a good fellow—take out your cheque-book:"—and Lord Saxondale condescended to adopt a coaxing and cajoling tone with the old usurer.

"Once for all, my lord, I cannot—I will not:"—and the money-lender, throwing himself back in his chair, assumed a look of sternest decision.

"But what's your reason?" demanded Saxondale, who scarcely thought that the money-lender, whom on former occasions, during his connexion with Emily Archer, he had found so pliant, could now prove completely inflexible: "what's the reason, I say? Am I not as well able to pay as I was some few months ago?"

"I don't know, my lord—I don't know," answered Musters mysteriously. "At all events, I decline accommodating your lordship."

"But I must and will know what is the reason," exclaimed Saxondale, really alarmed: and all the vague terrors which had been previously haunting him, came back with renewed force into his mind. "There is something strange in your conduct, Musters. Money-lending is your vocation, where you know it is safe; and you can have no fear in respect to me. Come, why don't you speak? If you have got anything in your mind, I wish you would out with it at once."

"I would rather not give any explanations, my lord," was the usurer's curt response.

"Well, I suppose the fact of the matter is," cried Saxondale, nervous and agitated, and full of apprehensions, which were all the more torturing because so indefinite,—"there is something in this marriage of mine that you don't like?"—and it was with difficulty he could give utterance to the words, which appeared to stick in his throat.

"Since you press me so, my lord," answered Musters, "I must candidly confess that you have stated the exact truth."

"But what the deuce has my marriage got to do with the business I propose to you?" demanded Saxondale, in a vehement manner.

"Simply this, my lord," rejoined Musters: "that if your relations and friends should take it into their heads to lock you up in a lunatic-asylum for having contracted such a marriage, what would become of any money I might lend you?"

Edmund—the wretched Edmund—sank back aghast at this announcement which struck him with the force of a revelation. It appeared to be the solution of all the vague terrors which were floating in his mind: it was the key to the reading of the mystery of his own feelings: it seemed at once to point to the impending evil whereof he had a presentiment. He longed to ask old Musters a few questions—as to whether he had only spoken at random, or whether he had any real grounds for throwing out such a frightful eventuality?—but when he endeavoured to speak, the words stuck in his throat, and he could only gasp forth a few inarticulate sounds.

"You needn't frighten yourself, my lord," said Musters, fearing lest the young nobleman should go into a fit. "I don't know that such a thing *will* happen; and I have no particular reason for supposing that it may. But this I do know—that where persons have a great deal of property, either in possession or prospective, there are always people more or less interested in getting them locked up; and heaven knows you have done enough to induce any two physicians to pronounce you mad a dozen times over. However, it's no business of mine; and I should not have said so much, had you not pressed me. And now, my lord, as my time is precious," added old Musters, looking at his watch, "you will excuse me."

Saxondale rose from his seat—and without uttering a word, quitted the room. He felt as if he were walking in a dream—not merely a dream, but in the midst of a hideous night-mare. There was a stunning and stupifying sensation in his brain: he felt that his position was a dreadful one—but beyond this he had not the power to reflect deliberately upon it. Mechanically did he re-enter the hackney-coach; and three times did the driver ask whither he was to proceed, ere Saxondale gave him any answer. Then, in a mood of thorough desperation, he said, "To the office of Marlow and Malton, Parliament Street."

Why he gave this address he scarcely knew: but it seemed to him that he was in a state of horrible uncertainty which must be cleared up. He had better know the worst at once; and if any such shocking intention as that at which Musters had hinted, were entertained concerning him, he would rather be informed of it than continue in a frightful suspense. It did not occur to him that supposing such an aim was really in view, those who purposed it would keep their own counsel until the moment of its execution. In short, he had no power nor faculty for deliberate meditation; and from this half-stupified condition of mind he was scarcely aroused somewhat, when the hackney-coach stopped at the lawyers' office in Parliament Street.

Alighting from the vehicle, Lord Saxondale was seized with another fit of hesitation; and for a few moments he was almost inclined to depart again, without seeking an interview with Marlow and Malton. He would probably have done so, had he not suddenly recollected that his wife had asked him for money; and as he had none to give her, he felt afraid to return into her presence without being able to gratify her request. He therefore ascended the stairs; and entering the clerks' office, inquired if either of their employers was within? He was informed that Mr. Marlow was in his private room—but that he had two gentlemen with him: whereupon Edmund said he would wait. One of the clerks took in his name; and returned, saying, "Mr. Marlow is not particularly engaged, my lord: he has only got two friends with him; and he hopes your lordship will walk in without ceremony."

Edmund was suddenly cheered by this invitation: it looked as if the lawyer-guardian was inclined to be more civil than the diplomatic one;—and again assuming an off-hand manner, and mustering up all his courage, Lord Saxondale passed into the private office. There he found Marlow seated with two gentlemen, with whom Edmund was altogether unacquainted. One was an elderly man, with gray hair—dressed in deep black—and having a very serious look. The other was some years younger—handsome, and apparently good-humoured—gaily apparelled—and with a massive watch-chain festooning over a bright-hued waistcoat. Marlow introduced Lord Saxondale to these gentlemen—but did not mention their names in return. This however Edmund considered to be an oversight; and thinking nothing more of it, took a seat.

"Well, my lord," said Marlow, smiling archly, "so you have perpetrated matrimony—eh? I have not paid my respects at Saxondale House, because I thought I was not wanted."

"And why did you think that?" inquired Edmund, still more cheered than at first by the jovial kind of good-naturedly bantering tone which the solicitor adopted.

"Why do I think so?" ejaculated Marlow: "why, because you did not condescend to consult me as to the alliance—although you ought, you know, to have done so—strictly speaking—as I am your guardian. Neither did you send me a piece of the wedding-cake:"—and here he laughed again.

"Upon my word, there was no wedding-cake at all!" replied Edmund, laughing likewise. "You see, it was all done in such a hurry——"

"So I understand," interrupted Marlow. "Come, do tell us all about it: it will be so very amusing! These are friends of mine—very intimate friends—capital fellows too—and so you needn't mind speaking before them."

"Oh! not I," ejaculated Edmund, perfectly rejoiced at the manner in which his marriage was treated by the attorney, and making sure that his pecuniary demands would be unhesitatingly complied with. "Of course you have heard that Lady Saxondale—the *new* Lady Saxondale, I mean—is a very beautiful woman!"

"Oh! that is well known," responded Marlow. "I think you never saw her before you met her that night at the Odeon Theatre?"

"Never," replied Edmund.

"Ah! then see what an effect beauty has upon your lordship," cried Marlow, rubbing his hands quite gleefully. "Why, the next morning—— yes, I do believe from what Petersfield told me, the very next morning—you carried off the prize—wasn't it so? Really your lordship is a perfect killer of ladies' hearts. But tell us—was it not so?"

"Well, it was," answered Edmund. "But you see, she is so exceedingly beautiful—so fascinating——"

"To be sure—to be sure," observed Marlow. "And then you travelled straight off with her ladyship—brought the fair prize to London—and married her as quick as special license and parson's aid could tie the knot. Am I not right?"

"Perfectly so," rejoined Saxondale, who felt himself quite the hero of the scene, and fancied the exploit was altogether as great and glorious as Marlow was depicting it.

"Pray excuse me, my lord, for asking a question," said the elder of the two gentlemen, both of whom appeared much interested in the discourse: "but is not my friend Marlow exaggerating the facts? Was it really the case that at the very first meeting your heart was vanquished by the lady, and her's became enthralled to you? and that you bore off the prize with such wondrous celerity?"

"It is all true—perfectly true," responded Saxondale. "Marlow has exaggerated nothing."

"Well, it was a superb feat," remarked the younger of the two gentlemen; "and your lordship has really much to be proud of. I suppose that your lordship did not condescend to any such low and grovelling proceedings as to inquire into her ladyship's resources—family connexions—personal circumstances—or otherwise?"

"Oh, no—nothing of the sort!" replied Saxondale: "it was all love—sheer love."

"And did her ladyship run away with you, my lord—or you with her ladyship?" inquired the younger gentleman.

"Oh! I ran away with her," responded Saxondale, determined to monopolize all the honour and glory of the proceeding. "But I say, Marlow," he immediately added, turning to the lawyer, "what the deuce is the matter with old Petersfield? I called on him just now—and he was denied to me."

"Why, my lord," responded the attorney, "you can't be surprised if Lord Petersfield, with his exceedingly precise and rigid notions of etiquette, should be somewhat vexed,—in the first place that

you did not consult him—and in the second place ——but I am fearful of giving offence——however, as of course your lordship must have the best possible reasons for knowing the accusation to have been false——"

"Oh, yes—her ladyship assures me that it was," interrupted Saxondale: "quite false! By the bye, she is very badly treated by the world; and it is my duty, as her husband, to defend and vindicate her."

As he uttered these words, Edmund drew himself up with as much dignity as he could possibly assume: for he was quite proud of the quotation from his wife's own injunctions, and which he thought peculiarly happy and well turned.

"No doubt of it," said the younger of the two gentlemen: "no doubt of it! Of course your lordship was acquainted with all the circumstances before the marriage took place?"

"Not a bit of it!" ejaculated Edmund. "During the journey I overheard several things that sounded uncommon strange; and I meant to ask her ladyship for an explanation: but such was her beauty, and so great her fascinations, that all other things were put out of my head——"

"Oh, of course!" interrupted Marlow: "so that if the Baroness de Charlemont had been a fiend in angel-shape, and you had been somewhat led to suspect it, you would not have troubled yourself to sift the matter to the very bottom?"

"Not I indeed!" observed Edmund flippantly: and he thought that this way of treating the affair was all very fine and manly—while Marlow's behaviour towards him put him into the best possible spirits.

"Well, for my part," said the younger of the two gentlemen, "I never knew a love affair so expeditiously conducted. Your lordship can say with Cæsar—'*I came, I saw, I conquered*?'"

"Capital!" exclaimed Saxondale, affecting to laugh heartily. "But, by the bye, my time is somewhat precious—a newly-married man, you know, must not neglect his bride—and so I must be off. Can I say a few words with you, Mr. Marlow, in private?"

"Oh! I can understand very well what it is," cried the lawyer, laughing: "the old song, my lord—eh? Money, I suppose?"

"Precisely so: and under all circumstances I hope you will write me a handsome cheque."

"I will send it up presently, my lord. Mr. Malton has just stepped out; and he has locked up the cheque-book. Let me see," he continued, looking at his watch: "it is now half-past one o'clock. At three, my lord, one of my clerks shall wait upon your lordship at Saxondale House with a cheque."

"I shall be at home at the time: but don't make it later, because I want to take her ladyship out for a little shopping."

"Not a moment later," responded Marlow: "my clerk shall be at Saxondale House at three o'clock punctually."

Edmund thereupon took his leave of the solicitor and the two gentlemen; and in a very different frame of mind was he borne away in the hackney-coach from the office, than that in which he had first alighted there. On returning home, he said nothing to his wife of the rebuff he had experienced at Lord Petersfield's—nor of his fruitless visit to the money-lender: all he deemed it necessary to say, was that he had seen one of his guardians, who was most kind and civil, and who would send him up a cheque for a considerable sum at three o'clock. The bride was evidently much pleased with this intelligence; and the carriage was ordered to be in readiness at half-past three to take Lord and Lady Saxondale out on their shopping expedition.

Punctually at three o'clock a hackney-coach drew up to the door of Saxondale House; and one of the lawyers' clerks, whom Edmund knew by sight, was shown up to the drawing-room where he was seated.

"Please your lordship," said the clerk, "Mr. Marlow has brought the cheque: but he wishes to say something to your lordship—he is in a very great hurry—is sorry to take such a liberty with your lordship—but if you would step down and speak to him in the coach, he would esteem it a most particular favour."

"Oh, no liberty—not a bit of it!" ejaculated Edmund, rejoiced at the idea of receiving the cash that he wanted: and he sped down the stairs three or four at a time.

Just pausing in the hall to take his hat, Saxondale hurried out of the house; and approaching the hackney-coach, looked in. The glance which he thus flung inside, showed him to his astonishment that Mr. Marlow was not there—but that two queerly-dressed men, with no very prepossessing countenances, occupied the vehicle. Edmund was about to turn round and inquire of the clerk what all this meant—when he was suddenly seized upon from behind, and tossed completely into the hackney-coach,—the two men receiving him in their grasp with more firmness than courtesy. A third individual—the one who had just pushed him in, and who was of an appearance similar to the two already seated inside—sprang in after him: the door was banged by Marlow's clerk—the wooden blinds were instantly put up by those inside—and the hackney-coach drove rapidly away.

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

CHIFFIN AT LIVERPOOL.

We must now go back somewhat, for a few minutes, to a former point in our narrative, in order to give certain necessary explanations. The reader will recollect under what circumstances Chiffin the Cannibal left the boosing-ken in Bethnal Green. He had arrived there with wet garments after his swim in the canal at Agar Town—he found that he had been robbed of his hoarded money by Tony Wilkins—he borrowed a suit of decent raiment from the landlord—and then he sped away in pursuit. But speedily struck by a sense of the imprudence of his conduct, he hied back to the neighbourhood of the boosing-ken; and on perceiving a policeman standing at the door, beat a precipitate retreat.

The explanations we have to give are these:—Chiffin had been seen and recognised by a person in the street when he was first entering the boosing-ken in his wet garments; and this person, knowing that a reward was offered for his appre-

hension on account of his murderous attack on Madge Somers, resolved to capture him. But not daring to make the attempt alone, and knowing from the general character of the boozing-ken that he was unlikely to receive any assistance there, he sped off to the nearest station-house. He shortly returned with three or four police-officers; and a rigorous search of the premises was instituted: but in the meanwhile Chiffin had fled in the borrowed suit of the landlord's—and therefore the search was vain. The policeman who was posted in front of the public-house, did not observe Chiffin when he peeped round the corner: and thus no pursuit took place. He got clear off, as the reader is aware; and after some adventures, betook himself to Saxondale Castle. But inasmuch as he had not merely been traced to that boozing-ken, but his cast-off garments were likewise discovered there, the landlord was compelled to give some account of his own share of the proceeding, to avoid being prosecuted for harbouring a man charged with felony. He therefore boldly declared that though Chiffin had occasionally frequented his house, he did not know who he was—and had not the least idea that he was wanted by the officers of justice. On being farther questioned, he gave an accurate description of the suit of clothes which he had lent him,—thus endeavouring to display the utmost zeal in affording the constables as much information as he could, in order to exonerate himself. The consequence was that an advertisement was drawn up, containing a description of Chiffin, together with the suit of clothes borrowed from the landlord: and this was inserted every day for a week in the newspapers,—after which time it was only published occasionally. These necessary explanations being given, the reader will better understand the incidents which are to follow.

On making his exit from Edenbridge Park—after his adventure with the Marquis of Eagledean and Elisabeth Paton—Chiffin the Cannibal pursued his way as long as it was dark; and when morning dawned, he stopped at a lonely cottage—where, on proving that he had the means to pay, he was accommodated with what he wanted. As a matter of course he had kept his word in not seeking an interview with Lord Harold Staunton; because it was his interest to adhere strictly to the terms dictated by the Marquis.

At that cottage he remained the entire day,—telling some plausible story to avert any suspicion which might attach itself to such conduct on his part. When night came, he set out again—pursuing his journey on foot until morning, when he again rested at some isolated hut,—resuming not his travels till the re-appearance of night. In this manner did he journey, taking care to avoid the metropolis, and crossing the Thames at Kingston. His way was then continued northward; and at the expiration of a week he reached Liverpool.

There he took up his quarters at a low pot-house in one of the obscurest neighbourhoods of that immense town; and cautiously instituting inquiries with respect to the sailing of vessels for America, he found that he should still have to wait four or five days before he could embark. He however felt tolerably confident of being enabled to remain in snug security at the public-house; and as he had plenty of ready money in his pocket, he possessed the means of whiling away the time with as much liquor and tobacco as were requisite for such a purpose. But he had not been four-and-twenty hours at this place, when he was horribly alarmed by reading in the London *Times* one of those advertisements to which we have alluded, and which were still repeated at intervals. It gave such a life-like portraiture of the man and such an accurate description of the costume which he then wore, that he felt his security would be terribly menaced if the same advertisement met the eyes of the people of the house, or any of its frequenters. He therefore hastened to pay his bill and take himself off. He however resolved to remain in Liverpool, as it was more than ever necessary that he should escape to the United States, now that he had received such a startling proof of the measures which were being adopted in London to capture him. The first necessary proceeding to avert suspicion from himself, was to obtain another suit of apparel with the least possible delay; and then he hoped that in a costume quite different from the one specified in the advertisement, and by shifting his quarters every night, as well as by keeping himself particularly close during the day, he might ensure his safety till the vessel should sail.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when he quitted the low public-house after seeing the advertisement in the manner just described; and recollecting that at no great distance there was an old clothes' shop, he bent his steps thither. After a very brief inspection of the garments displayed for sale, he made choice of a coarse suit fitted for one in the labouring walks of life; and perceiving an old white hat with a rusty crape band round it, he resolved to purchase that likewise. The bargain was made—he paid the money—took the suit—and went away with it. That night he passed at a public-house in another quarter of the town; and when he arose in the morning, dressed himself in the garb bought on the previous evening. Chiffin now looked something like himself again: that is to say, he was apparelled much in his wonted style before he had put on the borrowed suit belonging to the Bethnal Green landlord. It was a matter of calculation with the Cannibal to have thus assimilated his present raiment to that which he habitually wore. In the first place, it was so totally unlike that which was advertised in the newspaper: and in the second place, if he were seen at Liverpool by any one who knew him in London, the individual so recognising him would fancy it to be a mistake, and would argue that it was far from probable that Chiffin would dress himself in his old habitual style. Throughout that day he remained at the public-house where he had slept: but in the evening, in pursuance of his settled plan, he took his departure and proceeded to another in a distant quarter of the town. Had he still more particularly consulted his own safety, he would at once have retired to the chamber which he secured for the night's accommodation: but he could not resist the temptation of passing into the tap-room and sitting down to drink and smoke with whomsoever he might find there. He considered himself to be quite safe. It was one of the lowest description of public-houses,—situated in a very narrow alley, not above eight feet wide; and the old

tumble-down buildings hung so much over on either side, that the interval between the gabled roofs facing each other was even less than that between the thresholds of the front-doors. The boozing-ken was frequented by characters whose looks repelled the idea that they were very nice in their morals: the tap-room was filled with a dense cloud of tobacco-smoke; and the half-dozen men whom the Cannibal found seated there, were beheld dimly as if through a mist.

Chiffin sat down—called for some liquor and a pipe—and ensconcing himself in the obscurest corner, was half buried, as it were, in the shade of that nook and in the volume of smoke to which his own pipe now contributed. He did not immediately join in the conversation which was going on: for those who were discoursing were all friends with each other—and their topic was some matter interesting only to themselves. But presently there was a brief pause, during which more liquor was called for.

"By the bye," said one of the men, "what was that you was a-telling me, Bill, this morning, about some advertisement in a newspaper, and two hundred pound reward?"

"Why, about that feller—Chiffin, I think his name is," responded the individual thus addressed by the diminutive of Bill,—"him, you know, as murdered the publican and his wife in some place in London."

"And so there's two hundred pound reward, is there?" said another of the company. "My eye! shouldn't I like to get hold of it! It would just make me all right. But where do they think he is?"

"Ah! I dare say they would be uncommon glad to know," answered Bill: "but as they *don't* know, they keep on putting this advertisement into the paper. And talking of that there business, puts me in mind of what happened in this werry identical public, about five year ago. You recollect, Tom—don't yer?"

"Yes—I know what you mean," answered the person thus addressed, and who had the appearance of a costermonger. "I was sitting in this werry place, and was smoking a pipe and drinking a pint of half-and-half, just as I be now——"

"Well, but what are you talking about?" asked another of the company. "I don't know nothing of the business: but then I didn't use this house at that time."

"Well, but you lived in the neighbourhood, Dick," was the answer: "and you surely must remember how Jack the Rattler made his escape when the traps was arter him."

"I can't say I mind it," rejoined the former querist. "What was it all about?"

"Why, I will tell you. Me and some others was a-taking our pipe and pint in this room, when in walks a chap just as that genelman did just now:"—and here the man made a sort of flourish of his pipe in the direction of Chiffin, who began to feel excessively uneasy at his position, although he saw as yet he was not suspected. "Well, so he sits his-self down, calls for some brandy-and-water and a pipe, and begins to enjoy his-self. I couldn't help looking at him rayther hard—for thinks I to myself, 'There is something wrong about you, old feller;'—and yet I don't know why I should have thought so any more than I should about that ere genelman which is seated in the corner:"—and here there was another movement of the pipe in somewhat unpleasing indication of Mr. Chiffin.

"I suppose he had a precious queer face of his own," observed one of the listeners.

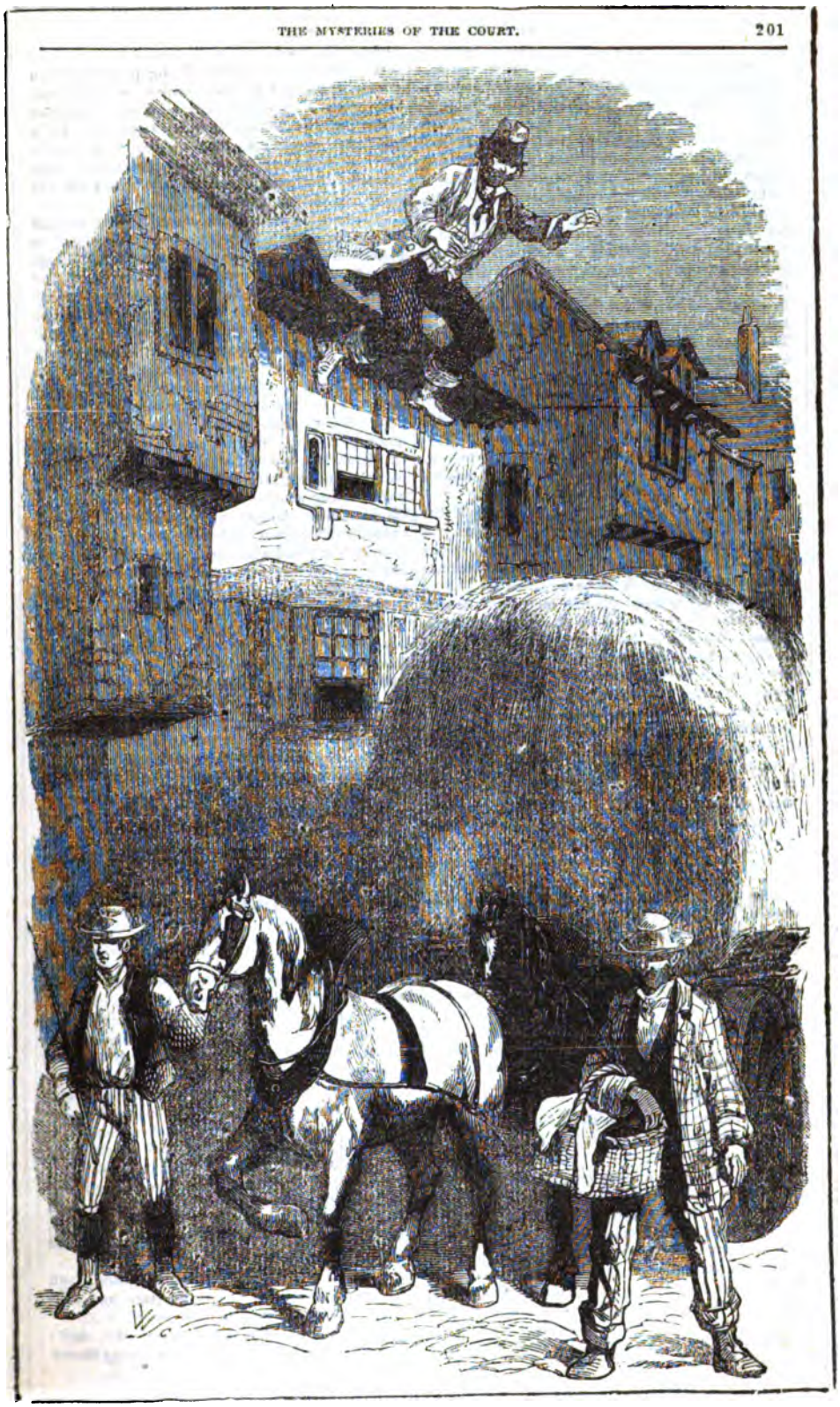
"No—it wasn't that: 'cos why, I doesn't judge by faces. If so be I did, I shouldn't perhaps think over well of two or three on us here; and I don't know that any of us is uncommon great beauties. Howsomever, the chap I am speaking of was smoking his pipe and drinking his brandy-and-water, when in walks two of the Liverpool police in plain clothes. I twigs them at once, and begins to ask myself a question or two, whether *I* could possibly be wanted?—but I wasn't kept long in any doubt: for the officers on looking round, sees the stranger-cove, goes straight up to him, and says, 'You are our prisoner.'—This was none other than Jack the Rattler. So up he jumps as quick as lightning: down falls one officer on this side—t'other on that side—I never see the thing so clean done in my life!—and in the twinkling of an eye Jack was out of the tap-room door. But there was such a crowd in front of the bar, and an alarm already raised, that his way was stopped: so what does he do, but rushes bang up the stairs—and by this time the two officers had picked themselves up and was arter him. Well, it seems he had slept in the house the night before, and he had observed that there was a trap opening from the top of a ladder on to the roof. So up this ladder he springs like winky—gets on the tiles—and somehow or another makes clean off."

"But how?" asked one of the listeners. "He didn't jump down into the street, I suppose: or else he'd have spared Jack Ketch a job."

"No—he didn't do that; and it was never known what he did do: but it's supposed he got in at some attic window of another house, and escaped that way. Howsomever, he did get clean off—and that's certain. Ah, poor feller! he got took at Manchester a few weeks afterwards, and was hung at Lancaster."

A pause followed this narrative; and somehow or another Chiffin began to fancy that all eyes were gradually concentrating their looks upon himself. This might have been mere imagination: nevertheless it augmented the uneasiness which he had already experienced; and he inwardly cursed his folly in entering that tap-room. He could endure it no longer, and resolved to take his departure thence and establish his quarters at some other house, where he would observe a more prudential conduct. But he was too cautious to beat a retreat with a precipitation that might engender suspicion if it were not already aroused, and confirm it if it were. So he knocked the ashes out of his pipe in a leisurely manner—poured the rest of his liquor down his throat—and then rising, said, "Good night, gentlemen;" and approached the door. He almost fancied that two or three looked as if they meant to spring upon him: but nothing of the sort occurred—and he issued from the room without molestation.

But scarcely had he thus crossed the threshold and closed the door behind him, when by the light of the gas blazing in the bar, he beheld himself confronted by two men whom at a glance he saw to be officers. There was a little space between the



tap-room door and the entrance to the bar—a sort of passage, whence the stairs likewise led up to the floors above. For an instant Chiffin hesitated what to do; for that first glance made him think that he was not recognised: but the next moment he saw that he *was*—and then, as the incident which had just been related in the tap-room flashed to his mind, he with one bound made for the stairs. The officers were after him in a moment: but Chiffin felt as if he were animated with the speed of the hunted deer. Scarcely a dozen seconds could have elapsed ere he reached the foot of that very ladder which had been mentioned in the tale he had heard. The officers, being outstripped, were left the distance of one flight of stairs behind him. The bright moonbeams were pouring in at the back window, and every feature of the place was thus clearly revealed to the view of the Cannibal. Up the ladder he sprang: the summit was closed by a trap-door fastened with a padlock—but with one tremendous thrust he burst it open; and disappeared from the view of the officers, just as they themselves reached the top of the staircase and set foot on the landing where the ladder stood.

Chiffin was now upon the slanting roof of the house. It has already been said that the moon was shining brightly; yet there were a few dark clouds floating above, and which gave a wild appearance to the evening. Quick as thought did the Cannibal's eyes sweep their glances all around, to discover what next was to be done, and find the means of ensuring his escape. The roof slanted down to a little low parapet overlooking the narrow alley, on the opposite side of which a similar parapet skirted the roofs of that line of houses. He measured the distance with his eye. The interval from parapet to parapet was a good seven feet; and there was the chance—nay, more, the hideous probability—of falling into the abyss, and being fearfully mutilated if not killed on the pavement below. But Chiffin's position was desperate. As well to die this way as to perish on the gallows! —and while he was yet hesitating, the constables were making their way through the open trap-door.

One tremendous bound—and the interval was cleared! Ejaculations of horror burst from the lips of the two officers at the moment that the Cannibal sprang forward: but even while those sounds were yet vibrating in the air, his foot had reached the opposite parapet—the gulf was between him and them—and they did not choose to follow him by the same daring and desperate aerial pathway. For a few moments they stood transfixed with amazement, and with a cold horror still upon them. They beheld him scramble rapidly up the sloping roof of the opposite house: he disappeared over the pointed summit of the gable; —and then they began to descend the ladder with the utmost speed.

Chiffin, on thus climbing over the roof of the house on which he had landed, found that its frontage looked upon a street considerably wider than the alley which he had so desperately cleared. But how was he to escape? There was an attic near: he advanced towards it—a light was burning inside—he peeped through the window: two working men were undressing themselves in preparation for their night's rest. The Cannibal feared to penetrate thither. Retracing his way along the roof of the house,—his feet being protected from sliding down by a parapet similar to those overlooking the alley,—he hastily approached another attic: but the instant that he looked in—for a light was burning there also—the most terrific cries of "Thieves! robbers! murderers!" were raised by the voices of two females: and he was compelled to beat a retreat.

But now his position was most critical: an attic on the opposite side of the street was opened—a pistol was fired—and the bullet struck the tilings close to where he stood. What was he to do? The whole neighbourhood would now be alarmed: for the man who had fired the pistol, likewise began to shout forth "Thieves! robbers! police!"

Chiffin cast one desperate look over the parapet. At that very instant an immense waggon was passing, with a colossal load of hay piled up so high as to be on a level with the tops of the first-floor windows of the houses in that street. One more bold leap, and he might yet be saved! Quick as the eye can wink he sprang from the parapet and alighted safely upon the hay. The unsuspecting waggoner, marching at the head of his team, little thought what additional load had suddenly fallen upon the burden which the waggon already bore; and a labouring-man, who was passing along on his way home with a basket on his arm, was looking around to discover the cause of those shouts and cries which met his ears.

A thick rope had been thrown over the load of hay to steady it; and without an instant's loss of time, the Cannibal slid down that rope at the back part of the waggon, and rushed along the street at the top of his speed. He plunged into a narrow alley diverging thence: it was quickly threaded—it brought him into another street—and thence another alley led into a maze of lanes, and courts, and dark thoroughfares, in the midst of which Chiffin relaxed his speed to a walk,—thus proceeding more leisurely in order to avoid attracting notice: and he felt that he was safe!

CHAPTER CXXIX.

ADELAIDE.

We must now return to Saxondale House, in Park Lane, London. Adelaide was in her own chamber, dressing for the purpose of accompanying her husband in the carriage, when he was so unceremoniously thrust into the hackney-coach and borne away. The extraordinary proceeding was witnessed by the hall-porter, a footman, and a page, who were standing at the front-door at the time. It will be remembered that a clerk from Marlow and Malton's office had thus enticed Lord Saxondale into the snare, and had closed the door of the vehicle the instant that the young nobleman was safe and secure inside: then, as the coach drove away, the clerk stood for a few moments, watching it till it turned into the next street and disappeared from his view.

"I say," exclaimed the footman, running down the steps, closely followed by the page and hall-porter, "what is the meaning of this?"

"What's the meaning?" echoed the clerk: "why, if you don't think that your young master

is as mad as a March hare, there are others in the world who do: and so, you see, they are going to have him taken care of at Dr. Burdett's asylum."

"Mad!" ejaculated the domestics, exchanging rapid glances with each other.

"Yes—mad to be sure," answered the clerk. "Do you think any one in his sound senses would carry on such games as he has been playing? This marriage of his is quite enough to convince any sensible people that he must be a stark staring lunatic—or else a perfect idiot, and improper to be left at large. I will tell you such a game! It was resolved to lock him up; and Marlow sent for two eminent lunacy-doctors to get them to see his lordship and report upon his state of mind. Well, Marlow was talking over the business with the two doctors in his private office just now, when who should make his appearance in the very nick of time, but Lord Saxondale himself? So, of course Marlow had him in; and it was fortunate it happened as it did, because it saved the doctors the trouble of coming here on some pretence to call upon his lordship. Marlow dexterously led him into conversation on those points which prove his madness; and his lordship talked in such a way that the doctors had not the slightest hesitation in signing a certificate that he was of unsound mind, and that it was dangerous for his own interests to leave him at large."

"But I don't think," observed the footman, "that you can call a young man mad just because he makes a foolish marriage. For my part, I care nothing about it, as I had already given notice to leave: but——"

"Oh, none of your *buts!*" interrupted the clerk: "it's all right—Lord Peterafield knows what he is about—and so do Marlow and Malton. Besides, there's another person who has given consent; and I shouldn't wonder if you saw that *other person* here presently, to put certain matters to rights:"—and the clerk looked significantly up at the house windows.

"Who do you mean?" demanded the hall-porter.

"Never mind who I mean. I daresay you will see all about it before the day is out—or I am very much mistaken:"—and with these words the clerk, bestowing a nod half-patronising, half-significant upon the domestics, walked off.

The page hastened to communicate to one of the maids all that had happened, and everything he had thus overheard. The maid in her turn lost no time in acquainting one of her mistress's principal dependants with the facts; and thus by the time Adelaide descended to the drawing-room, in the expectation of going out shopping with her husband, she received the astounding intelligence of what had taken place. Ordering her maids to retire, she threw off her bonnet and shawl, and sat down in no very enviable state of mind to reflect upon her position. But scarcely had she begun to meditate,—and a very painful meditation it was upon which she was thus entering,—when a page came in to announce that a foreign gentleman, who said that it was unnecessary to give any name, requested to see her ladyship.

Adelaide knew full well who the visitor was; and wild feelings of mingled hope and suspense, thrilling joy and poignant apprehension, instantaneously sprang up within her: but her countenance betrayed not the emotions that were thus excited in her soul. She bade the page introduce the gentleman: but the moment the door closed behind the youth, Adelaide pressed her hand to her brow to steady her thoughts;—and then, as an expression of anguish swept over her features, she murmured to herself, "What am I to do if he should reject me?"

But as the door opened again, she composed her looks; and rising from the sofa, awaited with apparent calmness the presence of him who was about to enter.

The visitor was a Frenchman, and of exceedingly handsome appearance. His age was about six-and-twenty: he was not tall, but his figure was modelled to the most admirable proportions. He had dark hair and eyes; and a glossy black moustache gave additional effect to the brilliancy of his teeth. He was well dressed—genteelly, but without pretension; and his countenance as he entered the room, indicated a certain degree of mournfulness, blended however with a look expressing severity of purpose. He bowed somewhat coldly and distantly to Adelaide: and then glancing to the door, as if to convince himself that it was closed and that the page had retired, he said, "I am here, madam, in obedience to your urgent summons. May I request that the explanation of your object will be promptly and briefly given?"

"And is it thus that we meet?" asked Adelaide, in a reproachful tone, while her countenance assumed an expression of tender upbraiding, not unmingled with the evidences of inward agitation: "is it thus that you accost me after such a long, long separation?"

"Ah! madam, circumstances have sadly altered since last we beheld each other," responded the Frenchman, with bitterness in his accents.

"Altered?" repeated Adelaide: "yes, they have altered! But have you not received from me the written assurance that my love is still the same?—and if it be not to address me in similarly fond terms, wherefore are you here now?"

She motioned to a chair as she spoke; and while the Frenchman took it, she resumed her own seat on the sofa.

"You ask me why I am here, madam," he said, still cold and reserved, and still with an inflexible severity impressed upon his handsome countenance: "I will tell you. It is because I perceive by your letter that you would never rest satisfied—that you never would abandon a certain hope to which you cling—until you had received from me the positive and deliberately uttered assurance——"

"Stop, Henri!" ejaculated Adelaide: "give not utterance to words that will stamp my unhappiness, until you have heard *me* speak!"

"Proceed, madam. I will listen."

"Let us go back, Henri, to other times. Do you remember how much we loved each other?—have you forgotten that when I was first introduced into the brilliant society of Paris, and was surrounded by suitors, my heart's affections were bestowed upon you?—have you forgotten that when a law-suit dispossessed you of your patrimony and reduced you to comparative poverty, I of my own accord offered to fly with you—I proposed to link my fate with your's, and to accept

your destiny as my own, even though dire penury should be our lot!"

"I have forgotten nothing of all this, Adelaide," answered the Count de St. Gerard, his voice and his looks now indicating some degree of emotion, despite his endeavours to suppress and conceal it.

"Ah! you are touched, Henri—I see that you are!" she exclaimed: "and how could it be otherwise? It is impossible for you to retrospect upon the past and not feel at least some sympathy towards me, even if you no longer love me. Ah! was it nothing that I voluntarily offered to resign all chances of acquiring for myself a brilliant position?—was it nothing that I proposed to flee away from the numerous titled and wealthy suitors who were kneeling at my feet, to join my fate with your's?"

"No doubt, Adelaide," responded the Count, in a low deep voice, "the sacrifices you would have made, were great—and it was the best proof of *my* love that I would not permit you to accomplish them. «No," he added bitterly, "poverty was enough for *one*: I could not have tolerated it when *two* were to share it! I could not have borne up against my misfortunes, if you whom I loved so fondly, must have had to encounter them likewise!"

"Your memory, then, has lost nothing of all which took place at that time," resumed Adelaide; "and perhaps you can conjure up with as much vividness as I now depict it to myself, that scene which took place between us when you resolved to leave Paris after the hostile decision of the tribunal was pronounced against you. You cannot have forgotten how you knelt at my feet—how you besought me to consent to that departure of your's—how you declared that it was better for us thus to separate! Did you not then assure me that though you must renounce the hope of ever calling me your wife,—nevertheless, so long as your existence lasted, you never could cease to love me? And then, too, in those parting moments of a dire anguish mutually experienced—mutually avowed—did I not as solemnly swear unto you that whatsoever my destiny would be—that whatsoever alliance the worldly-minded selfishness of my aunt might force me to accept—your image, and your image only, would be ever uppermost in my heart—that to you alone was my love given—and that never could I love another! Henri, have you forgotten all this? No—I feel assured that you have not!"

"No, Adelaide: and I am willing to admit," he answered,—"yes, even now in the face of all circumstances which have since occurred, that I look back to that scene with feelings of ineffable tenderness. And I will tell you more. When you espoused——the Baron de Charlemont," he added, as if with shuddering hesitation to pronounce the name, "I ventured to cherish the wildest—the fondest hope. I thought to myself that in the common course of nature, he could not live many years; and that he would leave you rich. I likewise thought that during those few years, I might create for myself a fortune instead of the one which I had lost; and that it was written in the book of destiny that happiness might yet smile upon you and me! Oh, it was that dream—it was that hope which nerved me with energy to carve out for myself a new career. I repaired to Strasbourg—I embarked in commerce, by the assistance of a few good friends—and my first ventures were all crowned with success. For upwards of two years was your image constantly in my mind. I thought of you without ceasing: the music of your voice ever appeared to be flowing upon my ears—my hand seemed to thrill with the last pressure which your's bestowed ere we bade farewell in Paris. But why should I dwell on all this?" he demanded passionately. "I built up for myself a fabric of hope: and, alas! I have seen it ruined. O Adelaide, you knew not the purity—the holiness of that love with which I regarded you!—and it was because I would do naught to desecrate what I believed to be the purity and holiness of *your* mind, that I never came near you—I never visited Paris—I never even ventured to send you a written line nor a verbal message, during the period of your wedded state. No: I felt that for the present you belonged to another—that an honourable man possessed you as his wife—and that I should deserve your contempt and scorn, as well as I should be sure to sink in my own estimation, if I ventured to remind you of our past love."

"And wherefore said you, Henri," asked Adelaide, trembling visibly however, as she approached a topic which she knew *must* be touched upon—and as she put a question to which she could but too well anticipate the response: "and wherefore, Henri, did you say that the fabric of hope which you built up was so cruelly destroyed?"

"Adelaide," responded the Count de St. Gerard, fixing upon her a look of mingled severity, reproachfulness, and commiseration, as if it were the countenance of her guardian angel that thus were that expression,—"would you have me believe that you were innocent of the dreadful deed laid to your charge? Oh! do not add falsehood to your other guilt! do not let that fair face of your's assume a bold hardihood and a brazen effrontery! No—do not! I ask you not to confess to me: but I beseech you not to proffer a bold denial in my presence. From the very first moment that I read that frightful—that tragic occurrence in the public journals, there was a voice within me which said, 'She is guilty.'—Yes, I knew it: I felt convinced of it: or I should have hastened to condole with you. As a matter of duty I forwarded you the affidavits to the effect that we had never met nor corresponded since your marriage: for the truth was contained therein—and you had a right to the benefit of everything that told on your behalf. Nor will I deny, Adelaide, that the interval which elapsed between your arrest and your trial, was to me fraught with the most poignant anguish: for I had loved you too well not to feel deeply—aye, fearfully on your account. It is also true that when I read the result of the trial, I fell upon my knees and poured forth my thanks to Providence that you had been spared the dreadful doom which would have awaited you had the verdict been otherwise. Yes—I knew you to be guilty; and yet those were my feelings on your behalf!"

The Count de St. Gerard became deeply affected as he gave utterance to these words; and drawing forth his kerchief, he for nearly a minute buried his face therein. Adelaide rose gently and noise-

lowly from the sofa—approached him—laid her hand upon his shoulder—and bending down, whispered in his ear, "Henri, if you were stained with ten thousand crimes I should love you still——aye, and all the more tenderly too, because I should have the conviction that those crimes had been committed on my account!"

"Adelaide—wretched woman!" ejaculated the Count, starting up to his feet, and gazing upon her with a kind of wild horror in his countenance: "this is equivalent to a confession which you have made! But for heaven's sake say not that you committed that crime on my account!"

"For whom, then, should I have committed it?" demanded Adelaide vehemently: "what other motive had I for perpetrating it? Yes, Henri—it is true—I will no longer attempt to deny it——I am a murderess——I poisoned my husband—I killed him ruthlessly! But as God is my judge, it was for you that I did it——for you, Henri, have I sold my soul to Satan——have mercy upon me! My God, have mercy upon me!"

Clasping her hands wildly, the unhappy woman fell at his feet. Oh, what a spectacle was that——the despair, the anguish, the entreaty, the love of that beautiful creature who had become a murderess on his account! He felt that it was terrible, and yet fraught with a deep romantic interest,—an interest that was fearful, a romance that was horrible—and yet replete with all the pathos which so frequently mingles with the darkest of tragedies. He gazed down upon her: the masses of her golden hair floated over her neck and shoulders: her two fair hands, firmly clasped, were extended up towards him. He could not behold her countenance—it was bent down—some of her bright tresses had fallen over it: but his eye could trace all the exquisite proportions of her shape—could behold the bosom, white as ivory, that was palpitating violently!

"Rise, Adelaide—rise," he said, catching her by the wrist: "this must not be. It is not to me that you must kneel: you have almost made me an accomplice in your crime by declaring that you committed it on my account. And yet, alas! I all along knew that it was so: I conjectured—I divined it! Rise, Adelaide, I say—and when you kneel again, let it be only to your Maker!"

He forced her to quit her suppliant posture; and she threw herself upon the sofa, sobbing and weeping bitterly. She who for some years past, had studied to exercise such a firm control over the outward expression of her feelings, that by this mere fact alone she had become a perfect mistress in the art of dissimulation,—she, that strong-minded being, was now unable to veil one single tittle of what she felt: she was all the melting, and tender, and weak woman once again.

"Adelaide," said the Count de St. Gerard, standing before her and speaking in a tone of solemn adjuration, "I entreat you to compose yourself—I implore you to embrace the conviction that it is useless to give way to whatsoever emotions are agitating and convulsing you thus! Tell me—wherefore have you sent for me to London? wherefore did you write and entreat me to undertake this journey from Strasbourg to meet you here? Are you not a wife again? have you not married an English nobleman of rank and wealth? and whatsoever my feelings may still be towards you, must I not respect the sanctity of this second alliance of your's, even as I respected the first?"

"Listen to me, Henri," exclaimed Adelaide, suddenly wiping away the tears from her eyes, and raising her flushed and agitated countenance: "hear me, I conjure you! After my husband's death I waited patiently for some months, saying to myself, 'He will allow a decent period to elapse, and then he will come.'—Such was my hope: but, as the time passed away and you came not, that hope grew fainter within me. Still I yielded not to despair; and I said to myself, 'A little while longer, and he will come.'—Every time the door opened, I expected to behold you: every time a letter was brought to me, my heart fluttered with the fond expectation that it was from you. But no: you came not—neither did you write. Thus did time pass on, till at length I could no longer shut my eyes to the conviction that you must believe me guilty—that you must regard me with loathing and abhorrence. And then, in the bitterness of my spirit, I said, 'I have become a murderess for his sake, and he shuns me: for him I have renounced all hopes of hereafter, and he abandons me in the present life.'—What phase of a woman's mind, think you, then developed itself? Pride came to my aid——aye, and I almost felt as if love were turning into hatred—as if affection were yielding to a thirst for revenge. I grew desperate. I was poor—that is to say, comparatively poor; and I felt that it would be impossible, with my limited income, to maintain the requisite establishment in the mansion where I dwelt. I longed to plunge into pleasure and dissipation that I might drown the feelings which were gnawing at my heart: and then, too, I thought to myself, 'He scorns and hates me: he abhors and shuns me. Oh, if I could obtain a brilliant social position, and if I were to bestow my hand upon one who could give it to me, it would be a revenge that I should be taking upon Henri. As he cares not for me, let me at least affect to show that I care not for him; and, perhaps, when he sees me wedded to another, he will bitterly repent his conduct towards me.'—Thus did I reason, Henri; and accident enabled me, even far more speedily and easily than I had anticipated, to accomplish my aims. You are listening, are you not?"

"I am—I am," replied the Count de St. Gerard, who had resumed his seat and had averted his countenance to conceal his emotions. "Go on, go on."

"Knowing that amongst the French nobility and gentry, who were so well acquainted with my history," continued Adelaide, "and who entertained a general impression of my guilt, I might vainly endeavour to obtain a husband, I resolved to see what the effect of my beauty would be upon English visitors to the French metropolis. It is through no idle vanity that I thus speak of this loveliness of mine. I know that I possess it—and I know its power. Arming myself with all my fortitude——I will even admit that it was also with that brazen effrontery to which you yourself have ere now alluded—I went to a ball given by the English residents at the Odeon Theatre. Lord Saxondale was speedily by my side. Shunned by everybody else—finding that my history was much

better known amongst my own countrymen than I had anticipated — I was being subjected to the most humiliating treatment, when that young nobleman came like a moth to flutter involuntarily around the brilliant light which dazzled his gaze. The conquest I achieved was such as perhaps no woman ever achieved before. But I had not been many hours—no, nor many minutes in his society—before I discovered that he was one of the most contemptible of his species. As for love for such a pitiable object, it were impossible, even though I had never loved before! But then he was Lord Saxondale—and, when of age, would enter upon the enjoyment of a brilliant fortune. We were married; and scarcely was the ceremony accomplished, when I would have given worlds to have it undone. My heart smote me with a feeling like a remorse: it seemed as if I had committed a crime towards you. For *then* I remembered that I had never made you the slightest overture —that if you had not written to me, neither had I written to you—that if you had not come to me, I had made no sign to show that I desired your presence. I was seized with an insurmountable yearning towards you: I longed to behold you once more—to ascertain what you felt towards me —to enter into explanations——in short, I felt it was an absolute necessity that I must see you: and hence the pressing letter which I wrote! Nay, I will even say more:—it was in a moment of despair, on the fourth day after my marriage, that I sat down and penned that letter."

"Despair, Adelaide?" observed St. Gerard, his looks displaying much emotion: "why do you speak of despair—you who must be possessed of a mind endowed with an even masculine power?"

"Yes—a masculine power," she repeated bitterly, "to be enabled to do all that I *have* done—to go through so much—to exercise such an incessant control over my feelings—to force myself to avoid the betrayal of what so often agitates in my thoughts——Yes, it does indeed put to the test the utmost vigour and strength of the mind! But you ask me why I use the word despair?——O Henri, you who know me well, can judge for yourself what my feelings must be in finding myself linked to a miserable conceited coxcomb — a self-sufficient puppy—a stripling who is both fool and coward! You know that I possess some intellectual qualifications—some power of conversation—some accomplishments: and you will perhaps pity me when you thus learn the character of him on whom the necessities of my position, and my own rash as well as morbid feelings, urged me so suddenly to fling myself away. And having taken that step, it was requisite to maintain a certain appearance towards this husband of mine. I could not suffer him to think that I had wedded him for his title and fortune only, or in a moment of desperate vindictiveness against yourself; and therefore am I compelled to simulate love. Love!——Oh, my heavens! love for such a contemptible thing as *he!* The idea is preposterous. Can you not now understand wherefore I wrote so earnestly beseeching you, by the reminiscences of any tender feeling you might at one time have experienced towards me, that you would come to me as a friend, even if it were impossible that you still regarded me with love."

"I obeyed your summons, Adelaide," responded the Count de St. Gerard gravely, "because I observed a wild desperation in the language of your letter—I feared lest you might do yourself a mischief—and I was resolved that on no account would I aggravate the griefs which were rending your soul. Besides, as I ere now said, I saw the absolute necessity of coming to a thorough explanation with you, so that after this interview we might separate, never to meet again!"

"Never to meet again?" ejaculated Adelaide. "Now you are plunging a fresh dagger into my heart! Am I not sufficiently unhappy? Oh, have mercy upon me! take compassion upon me! Are you unmindful of all I did on your account? Is not my soul doomed to an eternity of woe in another world?—will you not become its solace for the little space that it may linger in this?"

"Adelaide, what mean you?" cried the Count de St. Gerard: "would you prove faithless to the solemn vows which but a fortnight back you pledged to Lord Saxondale at the altar? would you render me an accomplice in your guilt? No, Adelaide—by heaven! I am incapable of such deliberate villany towards your husband. I feel that it was sufficiently imprudent—almost criminal indeed—thus to seek your presence: but it was to prevent any greater imprudence—and I will also add any greater criminality on *your* part—that I have thus come."

"What!" said Adelaide bitterly, "do you suppose that I am capable of murdering *another* husband for your sake?"

"Adelaide, speak not with this horrible levity! I was telling you wherefore I had obeyed your summons, and why I had come to England. Understand me well, therefore! Everything is at an end between you and me; and neither to the blandishments of your beauty nor the fascinations of your language, shall I yield. I must now depart. Already has our interview lasted too long; and if your husband were to enter——"

"Ah, my husband!" suddenly exclaimed Adelaide: "I had almost forgotten, in the whirl of agitated emotions which your presence has conjured up, the terrible calamity which has just occurred."

"Calamity? and just occurred?" echoed St. Gerard. "Unhappy woman! what new misfortune has overtaken you?"

"My husband," she responded, "has been borne away to a madhouse."

"A madhouse?" cried Henri, starting with amazement. "Is it possible that to crown all the rest, you have espoused a madman?"

"No—he is not mad," she quickly answered: "this is doubtless done by his relatives or friends to separate him from me. You do not know the laws of this country: in many respects they permit the vilest acts of despotism to be accomplished, and afford scope for the exercise of the cruellest vindictiveness. The certificate of two medical men is sufficient to consign any individual to a madhouse; and that terrific engine of coercive oppression has been called into request on the present occasion."

"But this is horrible!" exclaimed Henri, his handsome countenance flushing with indignation.

"Horrible, yes!" repeated Adelaide. "But what matters it to me how *he*—my husband—fares, if you will only speak kind and offer me the solace

of your love? Henri, let me go away with you ——I cannot be your wife—but I will be your slave!"

"Adelaide, speak not thus! it is impossible!" exclaimed St. Gerard energetically.

"What! you would leave me in my present distress?" she cried, in a tone full of anguish;—"and I who now feel that I love you more than ever! O Henri, this is cruel—too cruel. But you do not understand how I am situated. Doubtless those who have taken this step in respect to my husband, do not purpose to leave me tranquil. As yet he is a minor—he has no control over his own fortune—he is at the mercy of his guardians: think you, then, that they will make any pecuniary allowance for *me*? No: every instant do I now expect to receive a mandate to quit this house. My position is most cruel. By the circumstance of marriage, my own resources have vanished——"

"You know, Adelaide, that I commiserate you," interrupted St. Gerard; "and to the extent of my power will I assist you. Fortune has smiled upon me in more ways than one. Not only have my commercial ventures been crowned with success, but the very recent death of my competitor in that law-suit four or five years ago, has given me back the estate which was then wrested from me. Therefore, so far as pecuniary assistance goes, you shall have it, Adelaide."

"No, Henri!" she exclaimed proudly: "it was not to receive eleemosynary charity that I so earnestly courted this interview. I am not without immediate resources: I have some little money of my own which I had brought from Paris——But no matter! It is painful for me to talk on such subjects. Once more"—and here she threw into her looks and her language all the most melting powers of persuasion and entreaty,—"once more do I beseech that you will grant me your love!"

"Speak not thus!" interrupted the Count, in a tone of firmest decision: "it is impossible. No, Adelaide—everything in that respect ended between us long ago, and *never* can be renewed. Pure and chaste were you when we parted: pure and chaste shall you remain, so far as it depends upon me. There is one service which methinks I can render you—or at least I will endeavour. If I understand aright the exact circumstances of your position, everything depends on the prompt liberation of your husband. Think you that if he were set free, and if he addressed himself to a magistrate for protection—think you, I ask, that it would be refused? Give me the address of the place to which he has been transferred; and I will lose no time in adopting measures for his emancipation."

Adelaide was reflecting profoundly, and likewise in deep mournfulness, as St. Gerard thus addressed her. She saw that it was useless to entertain any farther hope of inducing the young French nobleman to accept her as his paramour; and she therefore, after some deliberation, resolved to avail herself of his services as a friend. For either she must flee away with him, or procure the restoration of her husband. The former seemed impossible: had not Henri said that everything was at an end between them so far as love was concerned?—and therefore she must accept the latter alternative. Besides, by doing this, she would most probably be enabled to see the Count again; and this was what she desired;—for all her pristine love was revived towards him with the fullest power.

"Henri," she said, in a low melting voice, "I accept the proposition you have made me: you shall serve me in this instance. I know not where the place is situate to which they have borne Lord Saxondale away: all that I have ascertained is that the establishment is kept by a physician named Burdett."

"It is enough—I will find it out," answered the Count de St. Gerard: then, as he was on the point of taking his departure, he recollected something, and said, as he laid a card upon the table, "There is my present address in London, should circumstances render it necessary for you to communicate with me. But I beg, Adelaide, that you will not ask to see me again unless those circumstances should prove *very* urgent. I cannot refuse to serve you as a friend—but in no other light. And now farewell for the present."

"Are we to part thus?" said Adelaide, taking his hand and looking with mournful earnestness upon him.

"Yes, yes—we must part thus," he answered quickly: and wringing her hand, he tore himself suddenly away.

As the door closed behind him, Adelaide threw herself upon the sofa—covered her face with her hands—and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER CXXX.

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

THE dusk of the October evening was setting in—the obscurity was deepening in the drawing-room where Adelaide remained alone; and when that wild paroxysm had somewhat subsided, she slowly removed her hands from her countenance and wiped away the tears from her eyes. She did not however ring for lights: she wished to meditate upon her position—to reflect upon all the circumstances which had this day transpired; and there was something in the growing gloom that was congenial to her own state of mind. Where she sat upon the sofa, the shade was darker than in any other part of the room; and thus, if any person had been present with her, the eyes of such a one would only have been able to perceive that there was a female form half reclining there, but would not have recognised who she was.

It was while the obscurity was thus deepening—and while Adelaide still sat in the depth of that shade—that the door opened, and a livery servant announced "Lord Harold Staunton." The domestic immediately afterwards said, "Your ladyship will have lights brought up?"

"No—never mind the lights," ejaculated Harold: "I shall not detain her ladyship many minutes—and my business is of too much importance to be delayed or interrupted."

The servant accordingly withdrew; and Harold, flinging himself upon a chair at some little distance from the sofa, said, in a voice which denoted a strange tumult of feelings, "Harriet, I am half

mad—I come to make you a proposition—listen to me in patience for a few minutes if you can."

Adelaide was so amazed by this proceeding that she had not at first uttered a word of remark in respect to the way in which Lord Harold countermanded the proposal of the domestic to bring up lights; and now, as he gave rapid utterance to those excited words, she instantaneously comprehended the error under which he was labouring, and that he fancied he was addressing himself to the Dowager Lady Saxondale and not to Edmund's bride. She accordingly held her peace; for the suspicion was strong in her mind that she might probably hear something which would be of service to her;—and at all events, her curiosity was strongly piqued. Harold, firmly believing that he was alone with the Dowager Lady Saxondale, interpreted this silence as an encouragement for him to proceed: and indeed his feelings were too powerfully excited to allow him to pause for any serious deliberation.

"Everything has failed, Harriet," he went on to say, still speaking rapidly. "I followed your instructions in all things—I went to Saxondale Castle—I found the man Chiffin there, concealed in the cloister opening from the chapel; and together did we penetrate into your bed-chamber. One of your maids—Lucilla, I think—was sleeping there; and we alarmed her desperately. But I procured the bottle of poison, and departed. Oh, what glorious visions then danced in my imagination! Methought I saw myself already Marquis of Eagledean: but the whole plan failed—I scarcely know how—suffice it to say that it did. I saw my uncle: it was under circumstances of such a fearful character that we met, I was for the time crushed and spirit-broken: I was converted into the veriest dastard and coward. He upbraided me bitterly—he menaced me with an appeal to the Court of Chancery to cut off the entail of the estates—he threatened me with exposure if I failed to do his bidding. You are listening attentively?"

Adelaide, who was indeed listening in utter amazement, as well as with the liveliest interest, made a movement as if to bid him proceed: but she said not a word.

"Well then, you hear me," he continued in the same excited manner as before: "you see that I followed your instructions, and that everything failed. The Marquis lives: my hopes are defeated—your revenge is ungratified. He ordered me to repair to Sweden; and I quitted him with the intention of doing so. I think I promised that I would—but I scarcely know what did take place on that frightful occasion. I came to London half mad; and in that state have I remained here for the last ten days. I feared to disobey him: and yet how could I obey? I understand his conduct well—I know what he means—I can read it all. He purposes to carry out his threat—to appeal to the Court of Chancery: and he thus ordered me to a distance, that I might not interfere with his plans. Therefore it is ruin for me to obey his mandate; and I know that it is equal ruin for me to disobey. I tell you again, Harriet, I am half wild! My nights are sleepless—my days are one long agony. At length—this afternoon—I learnt by accident that you had suddenly returned to London. I learnt too that Edmund is in a madhouse, and that you had turned his wife out of the house."

Here Adelaide could not suppress an involuntary ejaculation: but as it was brief and curt, it did not betray the different tone of her voice from that of the Dowager Lady Saxondale.

"You are surprised at what I tell you," observed Harold: "but on my soul, I was not prying into your affairs—much less watching your movements! I will tell you how it was. There is an old man in the City—a money-lender, named Musters; and he has a nephew who is a clerk at Marlow and Malton's. They do not know that this particular clerk is his nephew—and he let it drop inadvertently while conversing with me ere now. Well, I went to him to obtain some money ——in a fit of desperation, Harriet, I lost the other night at the gaming-table the whole of the thousand pounds you so kindly gave me at Beauvais ——But I find that I am speaking disjointedly and in broken sentences—you see how agitated I am! However, as I was saying, I went to this Musters—and he told me that you were in London: he told me too—but in confidence—what had taken place, or *was* intended to be done in respect to Edmund and his wife. Not a shilling could I obtain from old Musters: he was liberal enough with his garrulity, but inaccessible with regard to his money. However, the intelligence I received that you were in town, cheered me somewhat; and I rushed off to come hither. Harriet, I have loved and I have hated you:—I have tasted the joys of paradise in your arms; and yet I have at times menaced, coerced, and upbraided you. But now I feel that I do love you—that you are necessary to me—that it is impossible I can remain separated from you! Have I not every claim upon your consideration? I need not allude farther to that which has so mysteriously and terribly, but yet so firmly knitted together certain transactions of our lives. I do not come to use threats, Harriet: I come to make a proposal, and to back it by entreaties and prayers, if it be necessary. On your answer depends my fate. If you refuse, there is no alternative but for me to hasten away to Stockholm, and leave myself entirely at the mercy of my uncle. But no: I feel convinced you will not drive me to this! You will give me your hand—you will let me become your husband in name, as I have already been in fact: and then may I not merely hurl defiance at the Marquis, but *together* we may concert the means of carrying out that which failed the other day. Then, Harriet, you will be the gainer as well as I: you will become a Marchioness—and as you are ambitious, I know that such an elevation above the already high rank you bear, will not be displeasing; while as to wealth, you will enjoy far greater riches than your jointure affords. Now, Harriet, I have spoken candidly: give me your response."

Harold ceased; and there was a long interval of silence. He naturally conceived that the Dowager Lady Saxondale was pondering upon his words—while in reality Adelaide was still a prey to a degree of amazement amounting almost to a stupefaction. In a few brief minutes the most astounding revelations had been imparted to her. Her husband's mother was the instigatrix of a murderous plot against the life of the Marquis of

Eaglesdean—she had been the paramour of Lord Harold Staunton: and other things were hinted at as having linked their souls in some fearful intimacy—the intimacy of crime! Well might Adelaide be astounded: well might she be transfixed in every limb, and have the power of speech paralyzed, even if she had wished to use it at the moment. The gloom had deepened: it was now almost entirely dark in that apartment. Harold still occupied the chair: Adelaide still sat half reclining on the sofa. Nearly five minutes elapsed—and not a word was spoken.

"Harriet, what means this silence?" suddenly demanded Staunton, springing up to his feet. "You mean to refuse me—I am sure you do? It will be the death-blow to my hopes. You think more of my hate than of my love: you think more of the severe and unkind things which have passed between us, than of those intervals of bliss which we have enjoyed in each other's arms. Well, it must be so, then. I promised that I would not use menaces—and I will not. Besides, such menaces between you and me are absurd and ridiculous. Fool that I was to buoy myself up with the hope, even for an instant, that you would assent to my proposition! Your coldness when we met at Beauvais—a coldness which you maintained even when counselling me how to act in respect to my uncle,—that coldness should have told me that you considered everything to be at an end between us. Harriet, why do you not speak to me? Not one single word—only one passing ejaculation—has fallen from your lips since first I entered the room. Do you wish me to depart hence at once? Tell me so—and I will go!"

Adelaide was about to make the young nobleman aware of the tremendous error which he had

committed, when she thought that if by still holding her peace, he might be led to farther revelations in the course of fresh appeals and entreaties, it would be all the more serviceable to her. She accordingly continued silent.

"Harriet, this passes all endurance!" cried Staunton: "you are either treating me with cold indifference, or with contempt. Perhaps you are even gloating over my miseries? perhaps you hate me? and peradventure my sufferings and my humiliation constitute a delicious vengeance for you? Oh, but it is too cruel for you to treat me thus! You should remember what I did for you—the risk that I ran—the guilt I accumulated on my soul! Harriet, speak to me—or I will compel you. I am growing desperate—wild—mad! Harriet, I say, speak to me!"

And as Adelaide still continued silent, Lord Harold Staunton gave vent to an imprecation of rage, as he stamped his foot upon the floor.

"Well then, hear me for the last time," he exclaimed. "I told you that I would not use threats—and I will not: but I will give you a warning. That bottle of poison has fallen into my uncle's hands; and Chiffin confessed to him how it was obtained—that it was procured by me in your room at the Castle. The Marquis, recollecting the suddenness of Mabel Stewart's death beneath the roof of this very house, accuses *you* of the murder; and he points to that poison as the means whereby it was perpetrated. Now, Harriet, listen! If you marry me, my uncle has still so much regard for his nephew that I feel convinced he would take no step to strike that nephew a blow through the medium of one who had become his wife. But unless you marry me, it is impossible to say what course my uncle would adopt. Therefore in an alliance with me there is absolute safety for yourself: you see that it is no threat I hold out—it is a warning that I give! What say you, Harriet? One syllable—yes or no—and my suspense will be at an end."

Again he paused: again was there a long interval of silence. He paced to and fro—but without approaching near enough to the sofa to have his suspicions excited.

"Will you not answer? One would think you dead," he exclaimed, furious with rage, "only that the rustling of your dress is heard. How is it to be, Harriet? Speak! By heaven, I will wring an answer from your lips!"

Rushing forward, he was about to clutch her by the arm, when Adelaide, rising from the sofa, said in a firm and collected tone, "Your lordship is mistaken in the person whom you have been addressing."

A half-subdued ejaculation of horror burst from the lips of Lord Harold Staunton; and staggering back, he sank like one annihilated upon a chair.

"We had better have lights," said Adelaide, pulling the bell; "or the servants will think it strange that we sit so long in darkness."

Not another word was spoken till the domestic made his appearance with two lamps: for he had guessed wherefore he was summoned. As the first glare of light burst into that room, Adelaide perceived that Lord Harold was still sitting in a perfect state of consternation and dismay: but fortunately for him, he was so placed that the servant could not catch sight of his wan and ghastly countenance. The man retired: and then for nearly another minute was the silence prolonged.

"What do you mean to do?" at length asked Harold, slowly turning his haggard looks upon Edmund's wife: for of course he fully comprehended that Edmund's wife it was whom he had thus all along been addressing.

"My lord," responded Adelaide, who, having risen from the sofa, was now standing near the fire-place, her tall and splendid form reflected in more than one mirror, and her countenance revealing a certain subdued satisfaction and triumph beneath an expression of forced serenity,—"you have no right to question me thus: we are perfect strangers to each other."

"It is true, my lady," answered Harold, also rising from his seat, and approaching her, but still pale and trembling: "it is true! And yet the circumstances are so peculiar—the error was so immense—the things I have said must appear so startling—in short, I feel that I am altogether at your mercy——For God's sake, deal leniently with me!"

"Rest assured, my lord," answered Adelaide, "that I shall take no unnecessary advantage of what I have heard. If I avail myself of it, it will not be in spitefulness or malignity: the revelations that have reached my ears, will only serve as weapons of defence in my hands. Do you understand me, my lord?"

"I understand you but too well," rejoined the young nobleman, in mingled bitterness and anguish. "Edmund's mother is in your power—and you will make her feel that she is? Oh, insensate madman that I was——"

"But it is too late to deplore what cannot be recalled," interrupted Adelaide: and a smile of scornful triumph, which she sought not to repress, played upon her rich red lips, revealing the brilliancy of her pearly teeth.

"You will ruin me altogether with her who is now your mother-in-law," exclaimed Harold wildly. "You see what my hope is!—it is my only hope! But do not think that all those things I said are true——No, no—they were the ravings of a fevered brain——"

"My lord," again interrupted Adelaide, "you are going the best way to anger me outright, by endeavouring to persuade me against the evidence of my own senses. Beware how you make a woman fancy that you judge her for a fool: she can pardon almost anything but *that*!"

"No—do not be angry," exclaimed Harold: "you must make allowances for my feelings. From what I have said, you have learnt Lady Saxondale's intentions towards you. I beseech you, endeavour to come to some amicable understanding, whereby you may avoid the necessity of betraying what has just happened with me——Oh, do—I beseech you! Tell me, is there aught I can do to serve you? Command me if you will. I know that I am at your mercy: but again and again I implore that you will use your power leniently."

"My lord, a promise to that effect I have already given. You say that the Dowager Lady Saxondale is coming hither presently: do you not think that it will be more prudent for you to take your departure ere she makes her appearance?

Perhaps it may not be necessary for me to mention your name at all; and rest assured that I will not travel out of my way to do so. I am too much indebted to you for the important revelations you have made—although so unintentionally to *my* ears—not to feel anxious to show as much gratitude as I possibly can in return."

"With these assurances I must rest contented," observed Harold: but he lingered as if anxious to obtain a still more positive pledge from Adelaide, to the effect that she would hold him harmless. "Farewell, then," he at length added, seeing that of her own accord she would say nothing more, and he not daring to urge her farther.

He issued from the room; and she was once more alone. One short hour had wrought a marvellous change in the state of her mind and in her reflections. When Harold was first announced, she had only just wiped away the tears of bitterness and anguish which she had been shedding; and now an expression of triumph sat upon her countenance as the door closed behind him.

The reader has most probably guessed how Lord Harold Staunton was led into so stupendous an error. From what he had learnt at the hands of old Musters, he fancied that the Dowager Lady Saxondale had already been to the mansion, and had summarily ejected Edmund's wife from the threshold. Accordingly, on speeding with the most excited haste to Park Lane, he had demanded of the servants "whether Lady Saxondale was at home?" forgetting to specify *which* Lady Saxondale it was that he sought,—and indeed not thinking it necessary. The response was of course in the affirmative: and as the Dowager Lady Saxondale was supposed to be still upon the Continent, the servant who gave the answer did not think it necessary to particularise *the* Lady Saxondale of whom he himself spoke. On receiving that response, Harold had begun to ascend the stairs with so much haste that the footman had some difficulty in keeping pace with him—and still greater difficulty in getting before him on the landing to throw open the door and announce him properly. Thanks, therefore, to the gloom in which the apartment was involved, Adelaide had thus gleaned the most important revelations. We must incidentally remark that she had heard Edmund speak flippantly and superciliously of his mother—he had even assured her that the Dowager was too much in his power to show overt aversion to his marriage; and she had wheedled out of him the particulars of the adventure in respect to the masquerade-dress, and of the part which she had induced Harold to play in provoking William Deveril to a duel. From the first, therefore, she had never entertained an exceeding high opinion of Edmund's mother: but still she had felt that she herself knew too little of that lady's misdeeds to be able to convert such knowledge into a weapon either offensive or defensive. But during the hour which was just passed, Adelaide had learnt more than sufficient to compel her mother-in-law to sink down in terror at her feet,—or at least she thought and hoped so.

It was not long after Lord Harold had taken his departure, and as dinner-time was approaching, that the door of the drawing-room was suddenly thrown open, and Edmund's mother made her appearance. It will be convenient if we still continue to distinguish her as much as possible as *Lady Saxondale*,—at the same time signalising Edmund's bride by her Christian name of *Adelaide*.

Lady Saxondale still wore her bonnet and shawl: for having but that moment arrived at the house, and burning with anxiety to carry into effect the purpose for which she expressly came, she had not even lost the time that would be necessary to ascend to her own chamber and put off her superfluous garments. Nor had she paused to make any inquiries of the domestics; and thus she was not even informed that Lord Harold Staunton had called at the mansion. She entered the drawing-room with mingled disdain and scorn, hatred and vindictiveness, depicted upon her countenance,—while Adelaide rose from the sofa and made a dignified salutation.

"Woman, this is no place for you!" cried Lady Saxondale: then pointing towards the door which she had left wide open, she said, "Begone! pollute not this dwelling any longer with your presence!"

"By what right and title do you issue this mandate?" demanded Adelaide, who was resolved not to come to extremes at once with Lady Saxondale—but to sound as it were the depths of her mind, and obtain a greater insight into her true character and disposition.

"By what right and title?" repeated her ladyship. "It tests my patience sorely to be compelled thus to bandy words with you: nevertheless, as it is quite possible my son may have deceived you as to his real position, it is but just that I should explain it. He is a minor: eighteen months must elapse ere he will come of age; and in the meantime—even apart from other circumstances—all his property is in the hands of his guardians. By their concurrence it is that I exercise the fullest authority within the walls of this mansion, and likewise at the Castle in Lincolnshire. Now, madam, you understand the matter thus far."

"Your ladyship used the terms '*apart from other circumstances*,'" observed Adelaide: "may I request to be informed the meaning of that expression?"

"Well, I will curb my own impatience and gratify you so far as to be explicit upon that subject:"—yet as Lady Saxondale gave utterance to these words, there was an unmistakable malignity in her tone and her look, as much as to imply that her temporary forbearance would be speedily followed by a stern and implacable course of action.

"I am listening, my lady," said Adelaide. "Those other circumstances——"

"They are these:—that inasmuch as there is the best possible reason for supposing my son to be of unsound mind and incapable of managing his own affairs, it is more than probable that steps will be taken at once to ensure the placing of his property under competent management by the time that he comes of age."

"And that management," observed Adelaide, with the ironical tone of a retort, "is doubtless a task which your ladyship is seeking for yourself?"

"I disdain any response to your impertinence," rejoined Lady Saxondale, drawing herself up with

an air of glacial hauteur: then again pointing to the door, she said, "Depart, madam: your presence here is more than painful to me—it is loathsome!"

"Your ladyship," responded Adelaide, "must be conscious of far more power over me, than I can possibly acknowledge you to possess, if you think that I shall humbly obey the edict which you have issued with such a queenly air."

"Madam, we will not bandy words," exclaimed Lady Saxondale. "Depart hence—or I will summon the menials to eject you."

"Perhaps you will find it more prudent," responded Adelaide, "to exchange a word or two with me in the first instance: and for this purpose I will close the door."

Lady Saxondale was not entirely unprepared for something of the sort,—inasmuch as, knowing Edmund's weakness and flippancy, she had foreseen that it was probable enough he had boasted to his wife of exercising some hold over his mother on account of his knowledge of the masquerade affair and the duel which had resulted thence. But her reputation was already sufficiently damaged in the fashionable world for her to be perfectly indifferent as to anything more that might be said on those subjects. She however suffered Adelaide to shut the door; and then, turning upon her a look of increased disdain, said, "Now, madam, you will be so kind as to let our interview come to as speedy a close as possible, inasmuch as I am anxious to be alone."

"Your ladyship can be alone as soon as you think fit," replied Adelaide, "by the mere fact of seeking another apartment. Fortunately the mansion is large enough to accommodate us both. I have chosen this drawing-room for my own use; and I intend to keep it. I am not so rude as to command you to quit it; and therefore you may remain here if you choose. But if my presence be disagreeable, it assuredly is not I who will take the trouble to relieve you of it:—it is your ladyship who must seek another apartment."

"Madam, you will gain nothing by the adoption of this insolent demeanour. If you have anything to say, let it be spoken quickly:"—and again did Lady Saxondale bend her disdainfully flashing looks upon her daughter-in-law.

"It appears to be a struggle between you and me," replied the latter: and she assumed a demeanour as scornfully queen-like and as stately as the other.

"A struggle—how?" demanded Lady Saxondale. "Rest assured that it is a most unequal one, as I will presently prove. Behold! the time-piece on the mantel marks the hour of seven. In five minutes you will either leave this house with your own accord, or I pledge myself that you shall be expelled by force."

"And I, on the other hand," rejoined Adelaide, "declare as solemnly that when the hands mark half-past seven, I will ring the bell and order my dinner to be served up."

"This is a most matchless effrontery!" cried Lady Saxondale, stamping her foot: then as she instantly recovered her glacial dignity of demeanour, she deliberately put off her bonnet and shawl, and said, "Now, madam, will you be speedy with whatsoever you may have to state? Doubtless my unhappy son has spoken lightly and impertinently to you respecting myself;—and you think that you exercise a power over me—perhaps that you hold me at your mercy? If these be your notions, it is well to disabuse you of them at once: for I can assure you that I reck but little for whatsoever you may know concerning me."

"You are self-sufficient and proud, Lady Saxondale. But answer me truly," continued Adelaide, with an ironical smile: "are we not a pair well matched? is there not a certain fitness in the circumstance of my becoming your daughter-in-law? And yet there is this difference—that the world has thrown me off for a deed which I never committed; whereas you fled to the Continent from that society which was prepared to shun you for deeds that you had committed."

"Wretched woman!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale: "do you put whatsoever little failings as a woman may have become known in respect to me,—do you dare, I ask, put them in contrast with the tremendous crime of which all the world knows you to have been really guilty?"

"Perhaps, Lady Saxondale," retorted Adelaide, "if the world knew more of you, and could read more deeply into the secrets treasured up in your heart, it would be inclined to brand you with an amount of execration scarcely paralleled and never surpassed."

Lady Saxondale looked hard at Adelaide, but still without suffering it to appear that she surveyed her thus scrutinizingly: and then she said, "It is useless for you to throw out such detestable insendoes in mere random malignity: they do not come home. See! the five minutes are just expiring. Depart—or I pull the bell to give orders that the lacqueys thrust you hence."

"And I will ask the lacqueys," rejoined Adelaide calmly, "whether they be aware that their mistress was the paramour of Lord Harold Staunton?"

"Wretch! it is the vilest of scandals!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, her countenance becoming crimson, and then turning pale immediately again.

"So far from being a scandal," said Adelaide, "the very closest intimacy existed between your ladyship and Lord Harold——"

"The world knew it," interrupted Edmund's mother: "it was no secret—but it was an honourable intimacy: for we were about to be married."

"Very likely," said Adelaide, with a sneer: "but though the parson has never spoken the nuptial benediction, Lord Harold was your husband in fact, if not in name."

"Enough of this insolence!"—and Lady Saxondale's eyes flashed fire as she advanced to the bell-pull.

"Ring if you will," said Adelaide, still calmly; "and ask the footman who answers the summons, whether the ghost of Mabel Stewart walks at night through the spacious rooms of this mansion?"

Lady Saxondale let the bell-rope slip out of her hand: again she turned ghastly pale—but her eyes burnt like living coals as they were fixed with keen penetration upon Adelaide, whose countenance however was so serenely tranquil that her ladyship could not gather thence whether the words just spoken were a random shot thrown out, or whether they emanated from a more settled conviction. Believing the former to be the case, and speedily recovering her self-possession, she tossed her head

disdainfully; and once more extended her hand to the bell-rope.

"Well, if your ladyship must ring," said Adelaide, "let it be for the purpose of sending off a messenger to Saxondale Castle, in order to ascertain whether a certain person named Chiffin is still concealed there in the cloister leading out of the chapel?"

Once more did the bell-rope leave Lady Saxondale's hand without being pulled: and this time there was a still more visible and a longer continued trouble in her countenance: so that for a few moments she was unable to give utterance to a word. In those few moments she revolved in her mind—quickly as thought alone can thus exercise its power—how it was possible that this circumstance had reached the ears of her daughter-in-law. But when on the Continent she had received a letter from Lucilla, stating how two persons, one of whom was Lord Harold Staunton, had entered the chamber: no mention however was made in that letter of Chiffin *by name*;—but it now struck her ladyship that it must have somehow or another transpired that such *was* his name; and if this were the case, it was perfectly easy to account for the circumstance being known to Adelaide. But still, why should she so pointedly couple Chiffin's name with her's (Lady Saxondale's)?—why so significantly allude to his being concealed in the cloister, as if she herself must necessarily be aware of it?

"Come, madam," she said, "let us put an end to all this idle bandying of words. Do you mean to leave the house? or do you not?"

"It is a quarter past seven," answered Adelaide, indicating the time-piece on the mantel; "and I am still here. If I go forth, it will assuredly be to call on the Marquis of Eagledean, and inform him that Lady Saxondale was the instigatrix of his nephew in a certain attempt which was made against his lordship some ten days back."

The patrician lady to whom these words were addressed, could no longer blind herself to the fact that her daughter-in-law had indeed, by some incomprehensible means, obtained a farther insight into certain matters than was at all agreeable;—but if she knew so much, might she not know more? and it was of the utmost importance for Lady Saxondale to ascertain precisely to what extent such knowledge did reach.

"Go on, madam—say what you will," she observed, affecting a disdainful laugh. "We will yet see who will be the winner in this contest which you have provoked."

"I provoked?" echoed Adelaide, with a mocking smile: "this is too much! You come, arrogantly and insolently, to order me from the house: is it not *you* therefore who are seeking to push matters to extremes?"

"We will not dispute the point," rejoined Lady Saxondale. "Once more I command you to depart:"—and again was her hand stretched towards the bell-pull.

"Well, if you wish it, I will certainly go," said Adelaide: "but it shall be to inform the Marquis of Eagledean that Lady Saxondale has returned from the Continent—and that if he be desirous of asking her in a court of justice to account for the possession of that phial of poison which she directed Lord Harold Staunton to take from her room at Saxondale Castle, she is now in England to answer the charge."

Lady Saxondale was completely overwhelmed by these words: she saw that she was utterly in the power of that woman whom she had come to eject from the house. Yes—she not merely felt herself to be in Adelaide's power: but she was now filled with apprehensions as to what steps the Marquis of Eagledean might really take against her. To her all this intelligence was perfectly new: for, as the reader has seen, she had held no communication with Harold Staunton since they parted at Beauvais. Having however read no account in the newspapers of the Marquis of Eagledean's death, she had supposed that the plot was either abandoned or else postponed: but she had not the slightest idea that it had been attempted—that it had failed—and that she herself was so seriously compromised. She sank upon a seat, gasping for breath: and for a few minutes that proud, unscrupulous, strong-minded, and almost iron-nerved woman was the very picture of abject terror and grovelling mortification.

"Now, Lady Saxondale," resumed Adelaide, perceiving that her triumph was complete, "it is perfectly useless for us to prolong this warfare. I might, if I chose, tell you more: I might hint at certain dread deeds which have established a terrible intimacy—the intimacy of crime—between yourself and Lord Harold Staunton. But I need say no more. Look, Lady Saxondale!—it is now half-past seven o'clock. I am about to ring: shall it be to order my trunks to be packed up—or to command that dinner be served?"

"Whatsoever you will," responded Lady Saxondale, in a low thick voice. "I see that it is needful for you and me to make terms with each other."

Adelaide rang the bell; and as she turned to do so, a smile of triumphant satisfaction appeared upon her countenance. A footman quickly answered the summons; and she said, with an air as if she herself were the mistress of the mansion, "Let dinner be served. Lady Saxondale and I shall be alone together."

The footman bowed and retired; and the moment the door closed behind him, Lady Saxondale, advancing up to Adelaide, grasped her by the arm, saying, in the same low thick voice as before, "How came you to know all these things?"

"I may not tell you," responded Adelaide.

"But Edmund—does he likewise know them?"

"No—not one tittle beyond what you yourself are already aware that he is acquainted with."

This was at least some relief to Lady Saxondale's mind: but still she was utterly at a loss to conceive who could have been Adelaide's informant; and for a few minutes her pride prevented her from asking any more questions. But, racked with a thousand vague terrors—and these all the more poignant for being so undefined—she said, "If we are indeed to be friends, you will begin your show of friendship worthily by telling me whether I am in any danger on account of the Marquis of Eagledean."

"No—I believe not at present," replied Adelaide. "Ask me nothing more: for nothing more will I avow."

At this moment the door opened; and a page entered, bearing a note upon a silver salver, which

he handed to Lady Saxondale. He then retired. Her ladyship, instantaneously recognising the handwriting, hastened to tear it open; and when she had run her eyes over its contents, she threw a significant glance upon Adelaide, saying, "Lord Harold Staunton has been here; and he gives me to understand that through a terrific error he was led to make certain revelations to you."

"Now therefore your ladyship is acquainted with my authority," responded the daughter-in-law. "His lordship besought me not to compromise him with you; and I readily gave him to understand that I would not."

A servant now entered to announce that dinner was served; and the two ladies descended to the dining-room. Throughout the repast they maintained the most studied courtesy towards each other,—so that the domestics who waited at table, were surprised at this mutual friendliness of demeanour: for they naturally wondered how Lady Saxondale, after having had her son locked up in a madhouse, could thus, by her bearing towards her daughter-in-law, appear to sanction the very marriage on account of which she had adopted so stringent a measure in respect to the bridegroom.

CHAPTER CXXXI.

FARTHER DISCUSSIONS.

It was nine o'clock—and Lord Harold Staunton knocked at the door of Saxondale House. He was at once admitted, and shown into a parlour,—where in a few moments Lady Saxondale joined him. He advanced towards her with the air of a penitent,—while her demeanour was more conciliatory and friendly than he had expected to find it.

"You have forgiven me, Harriet," he said, taking her hand, which was not withdrawn, "for the frightful manner in which I have compromised you?"

"There is now no help for it," she answered: "what is done, cannot be recalled: and I am of course well assured that you did not thus compromise me wilfully."

"Thank you, dear Harriet, for these words," exclaimed Harold, his countenance brightening up. "No—I could not have done such a thing wilfully. I was half mad with excitement, produced by various causes, when I came to the house. I asked for Lady Saxondale—and was shown up into the drawing-room: the dusk was closing in—I beheld a female form seated on the sofa—it appeared to be of your stature and shape; and not for an instant did the idea strike me, that it could be any other but you. I said all kinds of things—I made every sort of revelation——But stay! I recollect now, thank heaven, there was one incident at which I merely glanced; I did not specifically mention it—and Edmund's wife could not possibly understand the circumstance thus alluded to."

"So much the better," observed Lady Saxondale: then, after a few instants' pause, she added, "And yet I am already so deeply compromised with this woman, it would make but little difference if she were acquainted with *that* circumstance also. You enjoined her, Harold, not to betray you to me as the author of all she had learnt: how was it, therefore, that you sent me the note confessing what you had done?"

"Because, on second thoughts," replied Staunton, "it seemed to me better that you should know the whole truth. I fancied that you would at all events be less uneasy—you would be relieved from uncertainty as to the source whence she obtained her information: and moreover, I felt it was so absolutely necessary that I should see you——"

"Well, I understand," interrupted Lady Saxondale. "And now tell me wherefore you are so anxious to see me? and what proposal it is you have to make, and to which you allude in your letter?"

"Then Edmund's wife has not told you everything which occurred between us?—or rather," added Staunton, "she has not detailed in full everything that I said?"

"She merely glanced, though pointedly enough, at certain incidents," answered Lady Saxondale. "But tell me first of all, Harold,—is your uncle exceedingly bitter against me? will he still seek to persecute me? can I remain in England in safety, think you?—for as you may but too easily conjecture, I have many reasons now for staying in London—at least for the present."

"The proposition, dear Harriet, which I have to make," answered Staunton, "will, if accepted, have the effect of insuring your complete safety. Yes—I am certain of it! My uncle does not seek to injure me, though as a matter of course he will cast me off entirely if you become my wife: for *that* is the proposal I had to proffer."

"I guessed as much," answered Lady Saxondale: "I understand your position exactly—and can comprehend the calculations which you have been making."

"And are you offended?" inquired Harold, not knowing what to think of her ladyship's tone and demeanour: for both were exceedingly calm and deliberate.

They were seated together upon a sofa: he passed his arm around her waist, as he spoke;—he drew her gently towards him—she did not resist—she did not manifest annoyance: he embraced her—and she suffered his caresses.

"You are gloriously handsome, dear Harriet," he said, "and I feel that I love you! Yes—I do really love you!"

"And you, Harold, are not entirely indifferent to me," she responded. "After a widowhood of nineteen years—a widowhood that was unstained by one single act of frailty—I abandoned myself to you. All my long pent-up passions then burst forth anew; and I wondered that I could for so long a period have retained my chastity. Now I crave you, Harold—dear Harold; and I accept you as my husband. But you know that I am lost to society—that I am as much an outcast as that vile being who has ensnared Edmund——"

"No matter, Harriet," interrupted Staunton: "we can doubtless manage to make ourselves happy together. Besides, we have a fearful identity of interests in many respects: and perhaps," he added significantly, "there is *more* which we have yet to do."

"Yes—there is *more*," rejoined Lady Saxondale,

with a look full of equal meaning. "I know, for instance, that you have not abandoned that project which has failed——"

"No: and guided by your counsel—assisted by you, Harriet—I will accomplish the aim. But you spoke as if *you* also had something to be done? Is it in reference to this woman—this Baroness de Charlemont who has managed to steal and pilfer the title and name of Lady Saxondale——"

"No—it is not to that wretch I alluded," responded her ladyship. "I shall be enabled to manage her by myself. I understand her character and disposition well—I comprehend her thoroughly—and I have little doubt that we shall come to terms."

"But Edmund?"

"He shall remain where he is. He is better out of the way, for many reasons."

"And Juliana—what has become of her?"

"She remains upon the Continent: she had not the face to come to England in her present condition. She even wondered," continued Lady Saxondale, "that I myself could venture back to the British metropolis, where my name has become a scandal with all those who were once my acquaintances and friends. For perhaps you know that your uncle forced me to sign a paper confessing that it was I who made overtures to that sanctimonious hypocrite, William Deveril; and this paper has been shown to every one who had heard my version of the tale as I originally gave it. But the intelligence of Edmund's marriage came upon me like a thunder-clap; and I was resolved, at all risks and at all hazards, to return to England and take certain steps. I only arrived the night before last: and as you have seen, my measures were promptly adopted. I took up my quarters in a private manner at an hotel: I went and saw Petersfield first—Marlow and Malton afterwards."

"How did they receive you?" inquired Harold.

"Petersfield, with his nonsensical diplomatic airs and his stupid pomposity, was inclined to read me a lecture on the levity of my own conduct. I suffered him to have his say, and expressed my contrition. He was so gratified by my demeanour of assumed humbleness—he thought that his own eloquence had produced such an effect—that he became quite friendly and kind. I therefore had little difficulty in bringing him round to my purposes; and as he himself observed first of all that Edmund must be mad to contract such a marriage, I gave him the credit of making the discovery of this madness—at which his conceit and vanity were still more highly gratified than before. So at last he consented the step should be taken to put Edmund under restraint. With Marlow and Malton it was a still easier game to play: they are lawyers, and look after the money-matters of the Saxondale trusteeship, troubling themselves but little about its morals. Besides, they like making money for themselves; and the more business they can create out of the trusteeship, the higher are their costs and the better they are pleased. They are accustomed, too, to accede to whatsoever Petersfield and myself may suggest; and consequently there was but little trouble in persuading them to consent that Edmund should be transferred to Dr. Burdett's keeping. Burdett married Marlow's sister; and therefore the circumstance of throwing a good thing in Burdett's way, was a further inducement with the lawyers to take this step. You are now acquainted with all these particulars; and it is your turn, Harold, to give me certain explanations. By the bye, I should observe that when on the Continent, I received a letter from Lucilla,—my maid, you know, who remained behind at Saxondale House,—telling me that you and 'some dreadful man' (those were her words) had burst into my chamber there while she occupied it."

"Ah!" ejaculated Harold: "then she recognised my voice? I all along had a misgiving to that effect. Perhaps it is fortunate that the recent plot in respect to my uncle should have failed as it did: for had he been made away with, that circumstance to which Lucilla could testify, might have afforded the first link of a chain which, if followed up, would have brought the deed home to me. Next time, Harriet, such precautions shall be taken, under your able guidance, as to ensure success."

"And now, Harold," said Lady Saxondale, "the explanations I wish you to give——"

"I understand. You mean the way in which the plot failed? From what transpired, it is evident that Chiffin was led to confess everything."

Harold then proceeded to relate those particulars in respect to the meeting with his uncle, which are already known to the reader; and he concluded by stating that Chiffin had been sent away to some foreign clime,—a piece of intelligence which Lady Saxondale was well pleased to hear: for whatever fresh deeds of iniquity she might contemplate, she had no thought of entrusting them to that man, who already knew too much concerning her.

"Now, Harold," she said, "I must tell you what there is to be done on my side. It must be accomplished by you—and when thus accomplished, our marriage shall immediately take place."

"Speak, Harriet," responded the young nobleman; "we are bound to render each other mutual assistance."

"I have learnt," continued Lady Saxondale, "that a certain woman on whom Chiffin made a murderous attack, is retained at the house of William Deveril. This woman bears the name of Margaret Somers; and amongst her own set, is familiarly known as Madge. A paragraph in a newspaper, which I saw yesterday, states that she is in a fair way towards recovery; but that she still lies in a very enfeebled state—and that the faculty of speech has not yet returned. This paragraph farther states that there is evidently something on the woman's mind, which she is anxious to communicate: for consciousness has come back, and she has regained almost complete possession of her reasoning powers,—as is evidenced by the signs she makes to those about her. She endeavoured a day or two ago to write something on a slate: but she could not—a dimness came over her eyes—and she fainted with the bare exertion,—so that the medical man who attends upon her, positively forbade that she should be allowed to make any fresh attempt of the kind. Now, this woman, Harold, is in possession of a secret which, if revealed, would prove my utter ruin. Do not ask me what this secret is: I cannot reveal it. It is a secret which

I would not breathe aloud, even if I stood alone in the middle of a heath, and could see a mile around in every direction, so as to be assured that there were no listeners near. You may therefore comprehend, Harold, that it is a secret of the most stupendous importance; and you may conceive the dire apprehension which haunts my mind, now that I know this woman to be in the midst of a nest of my reptile-enemies."

"It is indeed alarming," observed Harold. "Deveril is assuredly no friend of your's: he is intimate with my uncle, who is likewise a foe——"

"Yes—and it appears that Angela Vivaldi, the celebrated dancer who left the stage some time back, is William Deveril's sister. This girl," continued Lady Saxondale, "is ministering—according to the newspaper paragraph—in the kindest manner to Madge Somers. The journal speaks of her as a young lady of undoubted virtue, most amiable disposition, and generous heart. You may conceive the influence which such a being is likely to obtain over a woman whose mind is attenuated by illness, and whose conscience perhaps is somewhat touched. Besides, there are many reasons why this woman is to be deemed most dangerous by me. She has already extorted large sums of money from me——"

"And what would you have done with her?" demanded Harold. "As for penetrating into Deveril's house, and accomplishing that which Chiffin's knife failed to do——"

"No, Harold: such a course cannot be adopted," interrupted Lady Saxondale. "But the woman can be removed elsewhere, somehow or another——"

"Yes—that is the only plan!" ejaculated Staunton. "Have you already settled any project in your mind?"

"I have," answered Lady Saxondale. "Listen. I will explain it; and you shall then tell me whether you approve of it, and whether you will assist in carrying it out."

They continued to discourse together for some time longer,—indeed, until past ten o'clock; and they came to a thorough understanding as to all matters in which they were so darkly and deeply interested, ere Harold took his departure.

When he had gone, Lady Saxondale ascended to the drawing-room where Adelaide was seated; and taking a chair near, she said, "I think it would be better for both our sakes that we should lose no time in coming to specific terms."

"Such also," responded Edmund's wife, "is my opinion:"—and she spoke with the same decisive calmness as did Lady Saxondale. "What do you propose?—for as you are taking the initiative, you have doubtless some defined conditions and arrangements to suggest."

"In the first place," answered Lady Saxondale, "I must understand whether I have rightly interpreted your feeling in respect to Edmund. You are a woman of strong mind, sound intellect, good talents, and fine accomplishments. You may be well assured that it is not in mere idle flattery I tell you this. I know you to be above the impression which such flattery could alone make upon a frivolous heart. Being therefore as you are, and as I have described you, it is utterly impossible you can have any real affection for Edmund. You coveted a certain social position, with the enjoyment of wealth; and you may have your wishes gratified. In one respect they are already fulfilled: you have exchanged an unappreciated French title for an appreciated English one. As for money, I will be liberal in my offers. Therefore, do you consent that your husband should remain where he is?"

"Does it suit your purpose that he should be there?" inquired Adelaide: then without waiting for an answer to her question, she said quickly, "But of course it does! You will continue to enjoy, even after he has attained his majority, full control over the estates, the mansions, and revenues which belong to the proud name of the Saxondales—unless indeed the wife may in that respect assert claims, rights, and privileges superior to those of the mother."

"Understand me well, Adelaide," responded Lady Saxondale: "I will be all or nothing—I will be omnipotent in the ways which you have mentioned, or I will throw the whole into confusion, so that no one shall reap any benefit. For the Chancery Court, Adelaide, would reduce us both to mere cyphers in a moment; and I have the power of flinging everything into the vortex of that greedy and infamous tribunal. Nay, more:—as Edmund is a minor, a suit in the Ecclesiastical Courts for the dissolution of this marriage into which you have inveigled him—you see I speak plainly—could be successfully maintained."

"Perhaps it might," rejoined Adelaide coolly: "but you would not dare initiate it, in the face of all I have learnt concerning yourself."

"I do not wish that you and I," responded Lady Saxondale, "should assume hostile attitudes—although perhaps I may be less in your power than you think: for Harold Staunton revealed nothing which you could positively and actually lay hold of to serve as an offensive weapon against me. The Marquis of Ragledean will take no inimical step towards me; because it would be compromising his nephew, whom with all his faults he loves."

"But Mabel Stewart?" observed Adelaide.

"Her body would not be found in the grave where it was laid," answered Lady Saxondale, in as calm and collected a manner as that which Adelaide herself adopted. "It was taken up by resurrectionists, and fell into the hands of a medical man who anatomized it completely. However, let us not bandy words in this way: it will only excite ill blood; and we are discussing terms of peace—not the reciprocal modes of carrying on war."

"Proceed," observed Adelaide; "and rest assured that I am as desirous of coming to an amicable understanding as you yourself may be. But I remember that you were speaking ere now as to the feeling which I experience for your son. It is perhaps somewhat too hard to tell a mother ——I see you smile disdainfully——"

"I do," responded Lady Saxondale: "but perhaps you do not comprehend the reason. However, pray go on; and hesitate not to express yourself openly and frankly. We must not stand upon punctilios and nicetics."

"I was about to say, then," continued Adelaide, "that your son is assuredly no very loveable object. He is vain without anything to be vain of—conceited without the slightest justification

ADELAIDE SAXONDALE.

for his conceit—naturally ill-tempered where it is safe to display his malignity; but an arrant cringing coward where he has to encounter a spirit superior to his own. In short, he is almost beneath contempt: and now, Lady Saxondale, you can understand full well whether I am a woman likely to entertain any affection for such a pitiful stripling as this."

"I knew full well what your feelings were," said her ladyship, without displaying the slightest annoyance or vexation at this bitter satire which had just been passed upon Edmund. "You do not therefore want him as a husband; and you will consent that he shall remain where he is, so long as you yourself enjoy such happiness as under circumstances you have a right to expect. Now, what I propose is this:—It suits me for the present to remain in London, and therefore to inhabit Saxondale House. To you be the Castle in Lincolnshire assigned as a residence; and I will undertake to induce Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow to allow you two thousand a-year. Are my conditions accepted?"

"Yes," replied Adelaide, without an instant's hesitation: "I agree to these terms. But before I leave London I must receive the written assurance of Lord Petersfield that my allowance shall be regularly paid."

"That written assurance you shall have to-morrow," answered Lady Saxondale; "and the day after you will have the kindness to take your departure for the Castle."

"Agreed!" rejoined Adelaide; and having thus come to an understanding, the two ladies separated for the night.

CHAPTER CXXXII.

THE WARFARE OF DUPLICITIES.

It will be remembered that the Count de St. Gerard had taken his leave of Adelaide with an intimation that he purposed to adopt some measures to procure the release of her husband Lord Saxondale; and we must now observe that she did not entertain the slightest intention of frustrating this design, nor of recommending Henri to abandon it. She saw, as already stated, that all hope of winning the French nobleman to her arms must be renounced; and she was therefore desirous, for several reasons, to have her husband restored to her. Towards Lady Saxondale she was playing a very deep game; and it was entirely on the principle of "diamond cut diamond." The threat of a suit being instituted in the Ecclesiastical Courts to dissolve the marriage, had not been lost upon her; and she knew full well that if the marriage should once receive the express sanction of Edmund's mother and guardians, that suit could *not* be entered upon. Now, if a written acknowledgment from Lord Petersfield, guaranteeing the payment of an allowance, were obtained by Lady Saxondale's intervention,—the proceeding would be tantamount to such express sanction of the alliance. This was therefore what the wily Adelaide was aiming at when she accepted the terms proposed by Lady Saxondale.

She was desirous, we have said, that her husband should be restored to her for several reasons. In the first place, she wanted a companion; and it suited her well enough to have one whom she could render altogether submissive to her will. In the second place, she looked forward to the time when Edmund would be of age to enter upon the unrestricted control of his estates and fortune. In the meanwhile she would be strengthening her ascendancy over him: she would rule him by a judicious admixture of terrorism and syren blandishments;—and thus, when his twenty-first birthday was passed, she would enter upon the virtual sway of the broad domains, stately mansions, and vast revenues attached to the proud name of Saxondale. Her calculations descended to the minutest details; and the following was a part of her reasoning:—

"Edmund has been consigned to a mad-house on the pretext that he must have been insane to contract an alliance with me. But if he be emancipated from the asylum, how can he possibly be transferred thither again on the same plea, when the marriage will in the meantime have been sanctioned by the written document to be procured by his own mother from his principal guardian? Or again, if any attempt were made to capture his person once more, we would be upon our guard to offer resistance, and have succour constantly at hand: or we might retire to Italy or some other continental clime—anywhere but France,—and thus remain abroad until the period of Edmund's minority be at an end. And then, when once he enters upon the control of his property, his haughty mother shall indeed be reduced to a cipher; and I will avenge myself upon her who sought to trample me under foot!"

The reader may now fully comprehend the nature of that policy which was the basis of Adelaide's proceedings, and why she had so readily given an assent to Lady Saxondale's proposals. She fancied that Lady Saxondale was completely her dupe, and that her own ulterior designs were not suspected by her ladyship, inasmuch as they altogether turned upon the pivot of Edmund's contemplated release; and Adelaide hugged the idea that Lady Saxondale would be very far from supposing that such a proceeding had been thought of, or would be attempted. But, as will presently appear, it was a complete warfare of duplicities and hypocrisies, dissimulations and treacheries, which these two women were thus secretly waging against each other. Lady Saxondale knew full well that it was to Adelaide's interest to procure the liberation of Edmund: while, on the other hand, it was entirely to her ladyship's own interest that Edmund should remain in the asylum as a lunatic,—because on this ground the requisite legal proceedings could alone be taken to perpetuate the control of the property in her hands. The guardians would recommend the mother and not the wife as the most proper person to exercise this control: and indeed Lady Saxondale's plans were so well arranged, that if she could only keep Edmund locked up, she felt confident of success. At the same time we must here observe that although she knew it was to Adelaide's interest to have Edmund set free, she had at present no reason to suspect that a plot was already in existence to accomplish that end.

On retiring to her own chamber after that

conversation with Adelaide which was described in the preceding chapter, Lady Saxondale learnt from her maid that a foreign gentleman who gave no name, had that afternoon called upon Adelaide, and that he remained a considerable time. Her ladyship instantaneously suspected that this must be a paramour—and very likely the Count de St. Gerard himself: for Lady Saxondale was fully conversant with all the particulars of Adelaide's previous history. This was therefore an important discovery for her. If she could only detect her daughter-in-law in carrying on an adulterous intrigue, it would place her so completely in her power that she could reduce her to any terms and crush her into the completest submission. It naturally struck the wily Lady Saxondale that before Adelaide departed for Lincolnshire, she would communicate either personally or by note with this foreigner; and she resolved not only to have Adelaide's movements watched, but likewise to intercept any letter she might send out to the post. She accordingly gave her maid certain instructions; and by means of a handsome bribe, induced her to undertake the task now assigned her.

On the following day Lady Saxondale procured from Lord Petersfield such a document as Adelaide had stipulated for. She represented to his lordship that inasmuch as it would be impossible to carry out a suit for the dissolution of the marriage, in the absence of positive proof that Edmund had really been seduced, inveigled, and beguiled by Adelaide into that match, it would be better to make the best of a bad business and afford the wife sufficient means to maintain herself respectably. By pretending deferentially to consult Lord Petersfield, instead of to dictate her own will—and by otherwise flattering his vanity—Lady Saxondale procured the paper which she desired; and on returning to the mansion in Park Lane, she placed it in Adelaide's hands.

Edmund's wife had already made arrangements for her departure into Lincolnshire; and she fully purposed to proceed thither,—having resolved to dissemble her hopes and aims until her husband should be restored to her, so that no suspicion might be excited as to the existence of a plot for his liberation. When in possession of the document, which was precisely in accordance with her own views, she sat down in her chamber, and penned the following letter in the French language, but a translation of which we lay before our readers:—

"Circumstances induce me to depart immediately for Saxondale Castle in Lincolnshire. Lady Saxondale has returned; and it will therefore be better that I should thus at once absent myself from the metropolis—as in that case no suspicion can possibly arise of the project entertained for my husband's liberation. I need not conjure you to leave no measure unadopted to ensure this end: I know that you will keep your word. When Edmund is free, let him set off at once and join me at the Castle: urge him to do this—tell him that from a conversation which I have had with his mother, it is of the most vital consequence to his interests that we should meet without delay.

"ADELAIDE."

Having sealed this letter, and addressed it to the Count de St. Gerard at the hotel where he was staying Adelaide gave it to her own maid (the one who had accompanied her from Paris) with instructions that it should be immediately sent to the post. The maid, on descending the stairs, perceived several letters lying on the hall-table, and which were likewise left there to be forwarded to the post. Accordingly, to save herself trouble, she placed amongst them the one which Adelaide had just given her. Lady Saxondale's maid was upon the watch; and within a very few minutes that particular letter was in the hands of her mistress.

Lady Saxondale, on at once perceiving that it was addressed to the Count de St. Gerard, was seized with the exultant hope that she now held in her possession the damning proof of Adelaide's infidelity to her husband. She opened it very cautiously, in case there should be a necessity to seal it again and transmit it to the Count instead of retaining it in her own hands: and well was it that she took this precaution: for its contents afforded no such evidence as Edmund's mother had hoped to acquire. But it was scarcely of less importance: for it revealed to Lady Saxondale the existence of some concerted plan, having for its object the emancipation of her son. It by no means suited her purpose to intercept this letter altogether; as by so doing, Adelaide might suspect by whose means it had been prevented from reaching him for whom it was intended;—and such an occurrence might lead to an open rupture between Lady Saxondale and her daughter-in-law. She therefore secured the letter again with the utmost carefulness; and her maid restored it to the pile lying on the hall-table to be forwarded to the post.

Early on the following morning Adelaide took her departure into Lincolnshire. One of the travelling-carriages was placed at her disposal: she was accompanied by her own maid, and attended by a footman who was assigned for this service. Thus Lady Saxondale made every arrangement that might lead Adelaide to suppose her desirous of maintaining as friendly a demeanour as could possibly subsist between the two under such circumstances;—and indeed, from the moment of the reading of the letter, there was nothing in Lady Saxondale's manner to indicate that she had discovered aught of Adelaide's intentions with respect to the liberation of her husband.

But no sooner had the equipage rolled away from Park Lane, than Lady Saxondale ordered another carriage to be gotten in readiness—and drove at once to the office of Messrs. Marlow and Malton in Parliament Street. Mr. Marlow was in his private room, and thither her ladyship was forthwith conducted.

"I have called, my dear sir," she said, after an exchange of the usual compliments, "to inform you that Edmund must be removed to another asylum with the least possible delay."

"Indeed!" ejaculated the lawyer, looking slightly vexed at this announcement: for, as already stated, Dr. Burdett was related to him by marriage—and he had expected that his kinsman would reap the full benefit of Lord Saxondale's alleged lunacy. "I hope your ladyship has heard nothing to render you dissatisfied——"

"With Dr. Burdett? No—certainly not," interrupted the lawyer's client. "But I have received positive information—no matter how—that a plot

is in existence for my son's liberation; and the only way to defeat it, will be to remove him, under circumstances of the utmost secrecy, to another asylum. But the choice of such asylum may be left to the discretion of Dr. Burdett himself: he shall be entrusted with all the requisite arrangements; and the quarterly payments for the support of my unfortunate son, can be effected through the doctor's hands. In a word, Mr. Marlow, we will leave Dr. Burdett in his position as custodian of my son,—merely stipulating that the unhappy young man is to be transferred to another place."

"To be sure, to be sure," said the volatile Marlow, to whom this proposition on his kinsman's behalf was agreeable enough. "I will see about the matter in the course of the day. Indeed, I will lose no time; and Burdett shall be equally prompt in making the requisite arrangements. If your ladyship will leave it all to us, I will guarantee that everything shall be completed to your satisfaction within forty-eight hours."

"Forty-eight hours!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale: "it may be too late. During the interval the treacherous plot which is in progress, might be carried out. It is now only eleven o'clock—still early in the forenoon," continued Lady Saxondale, after consulting her watch. "I beseech you, Mr. Marlow, to repair to Hammersmith at once, and see Dr. Burdett. He is sure to be acquainted with some other physician who will receive my unfortunate son; and let the removal take place during the night. I rely upon your promptitude in this matter: for, as you perceive, it is really and truly of the highest importance."

"Then I will at once take it in hand," said Mr. Marlow; and satisfied with this assurance, Lady Saxondale departed.

CHAPTER CXXXIII.

THE SIGN OF "THE THREE CADGERS."

THE reader will recollect that we left Chiffin the Cannibal at the moment that he had effected his escape from the Liverpool constables. When having time and opportunity for mature reflection, the villain deliberated what course he should pursue. It was absolutely necessary that he should take his departure by some means or another for the United States,—not merely to obtain possession of the money which the Marquis of Eagledean had promised to remit thither for his use—but likewise because he found that his native land was getting too hot to hold him. All prospect of being enabled to take his passage in a ship from Liverpool was now put out of the question; and he resolved, after well weighing the position of his affairs, to take a bold step as the best and the only means of accomplishing his object. This was to return to London, and get on board some vessel bound from the Thames for the New World.

"It's pretty sure," he said to himself, "that those who got on my scent at Liverpool, had heard of my having made inquiries about the sailing of the American ships; and it's also pretty sure that they will send up to London to let the authorities there know that they precious nearly caught me, and that I am lurking about in the hope of getting out of the country. So, communications will then be sent off to all the sea-ports to keep a sharp look-out; and it will never enter their heads that I should be bold enough to go back again to London. Therefore that's the very thing I will do: for, after all, London is the place to hide one's-self in."

These reflections were made at a distance of a few miles from Liverpool; and no sooner was the daring conclusion arrived at, than Chiffin began to retrace his way towards the metropolis. In about half-an-hour he reached a railway-station, where a Parliamentary train, proceeding southward, had just stopped. The Cannibal,—excited by his recent exploits at Liverpool, as well as by some liquor of which he had just been partaking at a wayside ale-house,—was emboldened to seek any adventure which might further his views. He accordingly paid his fare, and took his place as a third-class passenger; and on the following day was set down within a few miles of the British metropolis. He roamed about in the fields and rested himself in ale-houses until the dusk was setting in; and then made his way towards the nearest suburb of London. This was Hammersmith,—on entering which, Chiffin bethought himself of a low boozing-ken wherewith he was well acquainted in that neighbourhood and on the landlord of which he could confidently rely, no matter what amount of reward might be offered for his apprehension. For this landlord, by making his establishment a receiving-house for the plunder of the thieves who frequented it, amassed large profits; and, at the same time, he was too much in the power of his customers to betray any one of them,—inasmuch as they would make common cause to avenge such an act of treachery. Here, therefore, Chiffin knew he would be safe; and being much wearied with his day's wanderings, he resolved to pass the night at the sign of the *Three Cadgers*—for such was the elegant appellation of the boozing-ken.

It was shortly after nine o'clock that the Cannibal entered this place, where he received a cordial welcome from the landlord; and passing into the tap-room, he ordered a good supper and plenty of liquor to be served up. Three or four other individuals, of the same stamp as Chiffin himself, and with whom he was acquainted, were regaling themselves there. They were characters of the most lawless and desperate description; and entertaining a high admiration for the Cannibal, they gave him a welcome as friendly as that which he had already experienced from the landlord.

While they were seated in the enjoyment of the various comestibles they respectively fancied, two gentlemen entered the room. One was of exceedingly handsome appearance and elegant apparel; and his mien denoted the foreigner. The other was of middle age—also well dressed—and was evidently an Englishman. The foreigner appeared to shrink back for a moment from the mean and dirty aspect of the place, the cloud of tobacco-smoke which filled it, and the ill-looking fellows who were regaling themselves there: but it was merely with a sense of loathing, and not of alarm, that the Frenchman—for such he was—thus momentarily recoiled.

"Go on, St. Gerard," whispered his English

companion, speaking rapidly in the French tongue: "it is here that you will find the instruments you seek."

"Your knowledge of London life, my dear Lawson," replied the Count with a smile, "does indeed extend to the most extraordinary places."

"I told you so when you communicated your wishes to me," returned Mr. Lawson, as he and his companion seated themselves at a hitherto unoccupied table: then instantaneously going on to speak in a louder voice, and likewise in the English tongue—so as to be both heard and comprehended by the men who were smoking and drinking there—he said, "My dear fellow, as you understand a little of my vernacular, we will discourse therein. You want to see London life in all its phases; and here is one of those public-houses where your desire may to a certain extent be gratified. Here, waiter!" added Mr. Lawson, turning to a dirty pot-boy who was looking for orders: "bring in half-a-dozen of wine, and glasses enough for the whole company. These good fellows here shall drink with us."

Thus speaking, Mr. Lawson threw down a five-pound note; and the dirty pot-boy, after staring at the two gentlemen with mingled astonishment and admiration for nearly a minute, left the room to execute the bounteous order he had received. At first Chiffin the Cannibal and the other men present—none of whom had very clear consciences—experienced some degree of uneasiness at the entrance of the two gentlemen, whose visit they naturally concluded to be some stratagem of the police: but the observations purposely made by Mr. Lawson disabused them of the idea—and the order for the wine convinced them that no treachery was intended. But Chiffin whispered to the friend seated next to him, "These swell coves pretend to come here to see a bit of London life. I wouldn't mind betting five guineas to as many brass farthings, that they have got some little business in hand which wants such chaps as you and me to help them in;—and so I'll give 'em a hint presently."

The wine was brought, and when the change for the five-pound note was given to Mr. Lawson, he tossed the pot-boy a couple of half-crowns for himself,—thereby establishing a fresh claim upon the admiration and gratitude of this individual.

"Now, my friends," said Mr. Lawson, thus familiarly addressing the ruffians seated around,—"take a glass of wine with us, by way of showing you are not vexed at what may seem an intrusion on our part upon a region so exclusively your own. The fact is, my companion is a French gentleman of fortune, who wishes to see something of London life in all its phases; and as I happen to be tolerably familiar with the lowest as well as the highest resorts of the metropolis, I have undertaken to be his guide."

"And very proper too, sir," answered Chiffin. "Here's your health, genelmen. There's worse wine at other places than the *Three Cadgers'*; and there's more unlikely cribs, too, than this one to look out for chaps when they are wanted to do a little business of a private or delicate nature."

"What do you mean, my good fellow?" asked Mr. Lawson, on whom Chiffin had bestowed a knowing wink as he delivered the concluding part of his speech.

"I mean exactly what I say, sir," responded the Cannibal; "and if you like to take me at my word, do so. Lord bless yer, I know London as well as you do, sir; and I know too that there's a many chaps with good coats on their backs, and a many ladies which flaunt in silks and satins, that stands in need at times of the assistance of such coarse-looking chaps as me and my pals here. If it wasn't so, I'm sure I don't know what would become on us. Do you, Jack?" he asked, turning to the individual seated next to him.

"No—that I don't," was the answer.

"You are uncommon sharp fellows," observed Mr. Lawson, with a laugh. "Well, the fact is I and my companion here do want a little business done."

"I guessed as much, sir," answered the Cannibal. "Speak out."

"Would it not be better, my good fellow," rejoined Lawson, "if you were to adjourn with me and my friend to another room to talk the matter over?"

"Well, just as you like, sir. Come—this way:" and rising as he spoke, the Cannibal approached the door.

"As we take your friend away from you," said Lawson, again addressing the other men, "we leave you the wine as a recompense; and I will also give the landlord orders to bring you in presently a couple of crown bowls of punch."

These announcements were received with much satisfaction; and Chiffin, having procured a candle from the bar, conducted Mr. Lawson and the Count de St. Gerard to a room up-stairs, where they all three seated themselves in a business-like manner.

"Now, my good friend," said Mr. Lawson, "I will endeavour to explain myself in a few words. I need not ask whether you are the man who will like to earn fifty guineas or so?—for you have something so pleasant and agreeable in your looks that they bespeak a readiness to render any sort of service, no matter of what nature, so long as it's well paid."

"I don't know about the looks, sir," observed Chiffin, with a grim smile; "but as for my character, you've hit it off as nice as if you and me had been brought up together from our infancy. And now, tell us what the game is, sir."

"In the first place, as a necessary preliminary," remarked Mr. Lawson, "give us some name whereby to address you. I dare say you have a dozen cut and dried for use as various circumstances may suggest. Tell us any one of them."

"Well, sir, Brown is an uncommon good name," replied Chiffin: "and so with your leave I will be Brown in the present business."

"Good, friend Brown," answered Lawson. "And now for the explanations. You must know that at a little distance hence there is a lunatic asylum kept by a certain Dr. Burdett. This you can promptly find out, if you do not already know where it is. Within its walls a young gentleman—or rather a young nobleman—is confined; and it suits our purpose that he should be emancipated with the least possible delay. Do you think this can be done?"

"Can a house be broke into?" asked Chiffin, with knowing significancy: "and he who breaks

in, can take another person out with him. That's English, I believe, sir."

"And very capital English too, friend Brown," rejoined Mr. Lawson. "But as a matter of course, there is a great deal to be done in the present business. When I tell you who the young nobleman is, you will have to ascertain by some means or another in which part of the building he is confined. Do you think you can manage this?"

"Servants are to be bribed, sir," responded Chiffin, "where there is gold to bribe 'em."

"You shall have gold for the purpose," was Mr. Lawson's answer.

"And who is the individual?" asked Chiffin.

"Young Lord Saxondale," was the response. "But, Ah! you look surprised——"

"It's nothing, sir—don't mind anything you observe about me. Sometimes the mention of names produces an effect on me. I know his lordship by sight: and that's a great help in the present matter."

"It is, Mr. Brown," observed Lawson. "But we are anxious that no delay should take place."

"Not a moment. What's o'clock now, sir?"

"A little past ten," answered Mr. Lawson, looking at his watch.

"Then I'll just step down in that neighbourhood at once, and take a look at the premises. Perhaps there will be some footman or servant-gal going out to fetch beer or what not; and if I can get a glimpse of their faces by the light of a street lamp or the gas of a public-house, I should very soon know whether it would be safe to sound the party on the subject. But you had better leave it all to me, gentlemen; and I dare say I shall manage it to your satisfaction."

"Take ten guineas," said Mr. Lawson, "in the shape of secret service money, as the Home Secretary would call it: in other words, use it for bribery and corruption as you think fit."

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind waiting an hour or so," observed Chiffin; "and then I could tell you more about it on my return: for there's a good many things to be taken into consideration."

"Go at once, and we will stop here until you come back. By the bye," added Mr. Lawson, "tell the landlord to send us up some brandy and some cigars."

Chiffin the Cannibal issued forth from the room; and during his absence, which lasted until near midnight, Mr. Lawson and his French friend whiled away the time by means of conversation and the cigars,—doing but little honour to the spirituous liquor. The Count de St. Gerard was in a melancholy mood: but his English friend, being entirely in his confidence, was acquainted with the cause, and studiously avoided any allusion to Adelaide Saxondale. At length Chiffin reappeared; and they both at once saw by the cunning leer of grim satisfaction which was on his countenance that he had tidings of importance to report.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, as he resumed his seat, "I think the business will be easy managed now. When I went down to the neighbourhood of the madhouse, I lurked about, making my observations in respect to the premises, and waiting to see whether anybody would come out. First I saw a footman—then a savage-looking chap that I suppose was a keeper—and then another feller that seemed as if he was a gardener or labourer on the grounds. Well, it was this third chap I got hold of: we went and had a glass together; and I slipped some money into his hand. So then he let out that Lord Saxondale was going to be removed this very night to some other place—but where, he didn't know. Dr. Burdett's carriage was however ordered to be ready at half-past eleven. So I told the gardener-chap he must find out where it was going to take young Lord Saxondale, and I would give him some more money. He agreed—and I waited a little while in the public-house till he came back. He brought me the news I wanted: for he had listened to catch the orders that Dr. Burdett gave the coachman after young Saxondale was put with a couple of keepers safe in the carriage."

"And what was the destination?" inquired Lawson, anxiously.

"Dr. Ferney's, in Conduit Street," replied Chiffin. "And that's a name too——But no matter. I think from some little knowledge I have of matters, I can do your business, gentlemen, as well as possible: but it can't be done, you know, to-night. It's too late."

"To-morrow night?" said Lawson, after exchanging a few whispered words with the Count de St. Gerard.

"Yes—to-morrow night, without fail," rejoined Chiffin. "I stake my reputation on it; and when I say that, I say everything."

"No doubt, friend Brown," observed Lawson. "You seem so confident of doing the business that perhaps you may think yourself justified in telling us at what hour, punctually, we are to have a post-chaise in readiness in the immediate neighbourhood of this Dr. Ferney's dwelling, that Lord Saxondale may be borne away beyond the reach of pursuit and danger?"

"I tell you what, gentlemen," answered Chiffin, when he had reflected for a few moments; "let the matter stand in this way;—that punctually at one o'clock to-morrow night, you can have a post-chaise-and-four in Hanover Square: but if so be anything should happen to induce me to think it necessary to alter my plan so as to make it an hour earlier or an hour later, you must tell me where I can let you know; for I have got to see another party, to consult him on certain particulars."

"Well, well," interrupted Mr. Lawson, "let the arrangements stand as you have suggested. My house is in Clifford Street, Bond Street"—and he mentioned the number—"at no great distance, you perceive, from the scene of operations. My friend here"—alluding to the Count—"will dine with me to-morrow evening; and therefore, if you have anything to communicate, you can send a note or call at my abode. If we hear nothing from you and see nothing of you up to midnight, we shall conclude that the arrangement stands good. And now take thirty guineas as an earnest of our liberality: and if you succeed in effecting the liberation of Lord Saxondale, we shall not stop at the fifty guineas originally alluded to as the price of your services. But one more word, Mr. Brown. What if you should fail? and what if you should be arrested in the midst of the failure? Can we rest assured that you will hold us harmless?"

"It would do me no good, gentlemen, to peach

against you," responded Chiffin, as he gathered up the money.

"No: and besides," added Mr. Lawson, "we might be of service to you if you got into trouble—which we could not be if we ourselves were involved in the same dilemma."

"To be sure, genelmen," rejoined Chiffin: but he thought to himself that if he did happen to get arrested it would be hard work indeed for his two present employers to save him from the gallows: he did not however consider it worth while to name this small circumstance to them.

"We will say good night, friend Brown," observed Mr. Lawson: whereupon he and the Count de St. Gerard took their departure.

"Now," said Chiffin to himself, "I must without loss of time make the best of my way to old Bob Shakerly, who knows all about the ins and outs of Dr. Ferney's dwelling; and he will moreover give me safe and comfortable accommodation at his own crib till to-morrow night. It's rather hard, though, not to be able to get to bed, so precious tired as I am: but these swell chaps appear to be liberal enough—and the more money I get hold of before I start for America, the better."

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

EDMUND AT DR. FERNEY'S.

MEANWHILE Dr. Burdett's private carriage was rolling through the maze of London towards Conduit Street. The windows were drawn up—the blinds drawn down; and Lord Saxondale sat inside, with a keeper on his right hand, and another placed opposite to him.

He spoke not a word: deeply depressed—miserably desponding, the young man was almost completely spirit-broken. Vainly, when first conveyed to Dr. Burdett's establishment two days previously, had he protested against the outrage: vainly had he declared his sanity: vainly, too, did he have recourse to prayers and entreaties—even the most abject beseechings—that his freedom might be restored. He found that he was entirely a prisoner—and that it was the intention of those around to keep him so. Exhausted with the excitement of his feelings, and the passionate outpourings of his intercessions, he had fallen into that depressed state in which we now behold him. Thus was it that he had slept soundly throughout the night following his captivity;—and the whole of the two following days he had wandered about in the spacious garden attached to Dr. Burdett's establishment. That he had for a moment thought of escape, was but natural:—when however he perceived how well the asylum was guarded, and that the walls were bristling with chevaux-de-frise like any prison, he abandoned the transient hope and relapsed into despondency. Thus the time had passed; and when late in the evening of the second day it was intimated to him that he was about to be removed elsewhere, he appeared for the instant rather pleased than otherwise at the idea of anything in the shape of novelty; but almost immediately sank down again into gloomy despond. Thus to those around him had he the air of a sort of melancholy madness.

We must now explain how it was that Dr. Ferney's mansion in Conduit Street was about to receive Edmund Saxondale. The reader has already understood enough of Dr. Ferney's character to observe that he was a man who devoted himself to the medical art, rather from an intense love of the study in all its branches, than from simple motives of gain. He had rendered himself a proficient in anatomy—he was a profound chemist, inventive as well as analytical—and he had lately thought of turning his attention to the peculiarities of the human mind. When once the idea occurred to him that his thirst for knowledge in the profession to which he was devoted, would experience some gratification in psychological study, he resolved to enter upon it. The phenomena he had observed in respect to the mind of the Earl of Castlemaine, gave an impulse to this desire on Dr. Ferney's part to push his researches and extend his observations in the sphere of the insane—or rather of those whose intellects developed peculiar aberrations and idiosyncracies. He had therefore caused a portion of his house to be fitted up in a manner proper for the reception of two or three patients; and scarcely were these arrangements completed, when opportunity furnished him with the means of forwarding his views. Amongst the few intimate friends that he chose to possess, was Dr. Burdett; and to this gentleman had he communicated the purpose which we have just explained. When therefore Mr. Marlow hastened to Dr. Burdett and informed him of Lady Saxondale's desire that her son should be secretly and privately transferred elsewhere, this physician immediately suggested Dr. Ferney's house as one where the patient would experience the best treatment, and would be kept in a greater seclusion than a large and regularly-established asylum could possibly afford. Mr. Marlow had not the remotest idea that Lady Saxondale was acquainted with Dr. Ferney; and even if he had known that she was so, he would still have been far from suspecting that there were portentous secrets existing between them. In short, the lawyer saw no reason why Edmund should not be transferred to the physician's house in Conduit Street: but, on the contrary, he saw every reason to regard this place as most eligible. Accordingly, Dr. Burdett despatched by a messenger, a few hurried lines to Dr. Ferney, to intimate that he would send him a patient in the middle of the coming night; and fearful lest by any accident the letter should be lost or peered into by its bearer, Dr. Burdett forbore from mentioning the name of the patient who was to be thus transferred to Dr. Ferney's care.

To return to the thread of our narrative. The carriage rolled through the streets of London; and half-an-hour after midnight, stopped at Dr. Ferney's residence in Conduit Street. The physician, who had duly received his friend Burdett's letter, was sitting up in expectation of this arrival. Mr. Thompson, who still continued to reside with the worthy doctor, had long before retired to rest,—leaving his benefactor to attend to his own avocations. When the carriage stopped, Dr. Ferney came forth from the front door,—his footman, who had likewise sat up, remaining in the hall. First one keeper alighted, and bade the

young nobleman follow: the mandate was obeyed by the crushed and spirit-broken Edmund:—the other keeper was close at his heels—and in this manner was he received by Dr. Ferney, who ushered him into the house.

"Dr. Burdett, sir," said one of the keepers aside to Ferney, "will write or call to-morrow, to make you acquainted with such circumstances regarding the patient as it may be necessary for you to know."

"That will do," answered Ferney. "But, by the bye, your master omitted in his note of to-day to mention the patient's name."

"I was ordered to explain, sir," responded the keeper, "that this was done purposely; inasmuch as there is some treachery at work, endeavouring to effect the young nobleman's liberation. But his mother and guardians feel convinced that it is absolutely necessary for him to remain under constraint; and his presence at your house must be kept as secret as possible."

"But who is he?" inquired Dr. Ferney.

"Lord Saxondale, sir," was the rejoinder: and as the keeper, having thus spoken, looked around to assure himself that the patient was in complete security, and that there was no avenue of escape, he did not observe the startling effect which his announcement had produced upon Dr. Ferney.

Almost immediately afterwards the two keepers took their departure: the footman locked, bolted, and chained the front door; and the physician remained alone in the parlour with his patient. And this patient was Lord Saxondale, the son of that woman whom Ferney had so long loved, but whose real name and rank were only so recently made known to him!—that lady, too, whose deep damning guilt was so marvellously brought to his knowledge—and who had knelt at his feet as a murderess, imploring that he would not send her to the gallows! Yes: the son of that woman who for so many long years had been the idol of his almost sainted worship—that woman whom he had loved with a devotion as pure as it was unfailing, as holy as it was unextinguishable,—the son of that woman was now beneath his roof!

Such were the reflections which swept hurriedly through the mind of Dr. Ferney when the keepers had taken their departure—when the house was locked up—and when he was alone in that parlour with his patient. Until this occasion Lord Saxondale was personally unknown to him;—and now, as he contemplated that short, thin, slightly made young man, he could trace in his features not the slightest resemblance to Lady Saxondale. The mother had hair of raven blackness—Edmund hair of yellowish brown: the former had eyes large and dark, and flashing fire—the latter eyes which can only be described as of the ignoble hue of greenish grey: the former was characterised by an aquiline profile—the latter with features mean and vulgar. There was something grand and magnificent in the appearance of Lady Saxondale—something despicable and paltry in that of Edmund. Never was there such dissimilitude between two individuals bearing such relationship to each other!

Dr. Ferney was amazed: but his was not a countenance that vividly exhibited such a feeling; and therefore Edmund, who sat looking up at him, noticed not the sentiment his presence inspired. Gradually strange ideas began creeping into the mind of Dr. Ferney. His memory travelled back to bygone days: he retrospected to that period when he was first acquainted with Lady Saxondale—and to the incident which had to a certain degree linked them most mysteriously together. Slowly turning aside, Dr. Ferney raised his hand to his brow, and murmured to himself, "My God! my God! if it should be so—and if I have been instrumental——But, no: it cannot be! And yet if not *that*, what *else*?"

The unhappy man was well nigh overcome by these dread misgivings—these dire apprehensions, which had arisen in his soul: but still Edmund Saxondale observed not the physician's emotion—for he had cast down his eyes, and had relapsed into the profoundest despondency. He had seen that the entreaties and prayers addressed to Dr. Burdett were so unavailing that he had not the heart nor the courage to repeat them over again to this new custodian to whom he was entrusted: he had heard too the locking of the front door—and the sound had smitten upon his ear like the knell of any new hope that for a moment he might have formed. Presently he became aware that the physician, with whose very name he was unacquainted, was approaching him; and looking up from the sofa where he sat, he was as much surprised as suddenly delighted to observe the truly compassionate manner in which Dr. Ferney was regarding him.

"Pray tell me who you are, and where this house is situated?" said Lord Saxondale, whose habitual arrogance and flippant air of assumption had yielded beneath the heavy weight of humiliating adversity: "for Dr. Burdett told me nothing more than that I was to be removed elsewhere—and the carriage that brought me hither, had the blinds down."

"My young friend," responded the physician, in a kind tone, and seating himself by Edmund's side, "I will give you such explanations as you may require. My name is Ferney—and this house is in Conduit Street. Believe me, you shall be treated with the utmost kindness. Every day, when it is fine, we will go out in my carriage together; and when in the open country, we will alight and walk—for there is but a very small garden attached to this house——"

"But my dear sir," interrupted Edmund, still cheered and encouraged by the physician's words and manner; "I really am not mad. I know that I have been foolish, headstrong, and infatuated—and that I did a very mad action: but still I am in the full possession of my intellects. My mother and guardians have treated me infamously in having me locked up. I know that it is all my mother's and old Petersfield's doing: they are at the bottom of it. But question me on any subject you like; and you will see whether I give you rational answers. I know why I have been pronounced mad: it was because I fell desperately in love with a very splendid creature ——love at first sight——and the circumstances were so peculiar, that I married her. It was all done in a few days—as quick indeed as it could be done. But a single mad action does not prove thorough and complete madness in all things."

"It is now so very late, my young friend," observed Dr. Ferney, "that we had better post-

pone all further discourse until to-morrow. Immediately after breakfast I will devote an hour or two to hear all that you may have to say."

"And if you are satisfied that I am not mad," exclaimed Edmund, now catching eagerly—indeed with the liveliest avidity, at the hope of speedy liberation, "what will you do?"

"I will assuredly recommend Lady Saxondale and your guardians to restore you to freedom."

"Ah! if it depends upon them, it is useless," observed Edmund, shaking his head gloomily, while a shade again fell upon his countenance. "I believe my mother hates me: she has told me as much. She once called me a viper that she had cherished to sting her. Was not that pretty language for a parent to hold to her son?"

"She spoke thus to you?" said Dr. Ferney, in a slow interrogative tone: and again he contemplated the young nobleman with a sort of melancholy interest, in which there was blended a certain strange expression, as if his own heart was enduring a sense of anguish.

"Yes—and often, for some months past, has she said things of this sort," replied Edmund. "I know that she hates me; and what is more, she is a bad woman—I am convinced she is, in many respects——"

"Enough! enough!" suddenly ejaculated Dr. Ferney, with a vehemence which appeared singular indeed to Lord Saxondale. "I beseech you, my young friend," he almost immediately added, "to ascend to the chamber prepared for you; and I renew my pledge that to-morrow, after breakfast, you shall unburthen your mind fully to me."

"With that assurance I must remain contented:"—and as he uttered these words, Edmund rose from his seat.

Dr. Ferney rang the bell; and the footman reappeared, bearing a chamber-candle. The physician shook hands cordially with the young noble-

man,—who was then conducted by the domestic to the bed-room arranged for his accommodation, and adjoining which there was another chamber really intended for a keeper, but where the footman himself was to sleep, at least for this night. For the announcement made by Dr. Burdett to the effect that he was about to send Ferney a patient, had reached the latter so late, and had come so unexpectedly upon him, that he had not as yet found time to procure the services of a regular keeper; and whether he would have to do so at all in respect to Lord Saxondale, he had resolved should depend upon the nature of the discourse to be held with the young nobleman on the following day.

It was long past one o'clock in the morning when Edmund was conducted to his chamber. Dr. Ferney did not immediately seek his own—but remained in the parlour, absorbed in profoundest thought. An hour thus passed; and then Dr. Ferney, taking a light in his hand, ascended to the suite of apartments to which Lord Saxondale had been consigned. By means of a pass-key he entered, without the necessity of disturbing the footman to obtain admittance. The domestic immediately started up as Dr. Ferney entered: but the latter, placing his finger to his lip to enjoin silence, continued his way into Edmund's room.

The young nobleman slept profoundly. The physician closed the door behind himself, and remained in that chamber for upwards of five minutes. When he issued forth again—and as the light which he carried in his hand, threw its rays upon his countenance—the footman, who occupied the ante-chamber, noticed that his master was very pale, and that despite the wonted serenity of his look, there was a certain trouble and agitation visible beneath the surface. Dr. Ferney passed on without uttering a word—and issued forth, closing the door and locking it with his private key. And when the physician reached his own chamber, did he immediately seek his couch? did he at once put off his apparel and woo the slumber, of which, at that late hour in the night, or rather early hour of the morning, he might naturally be supposed to stand so much in need? No: he paced to and fro for a long time; and if any one had been listening at the door of his apartment, the sounds of sobs and other tokens of anguish would have been heard issuing from within. At length he retired to bed; but whether, when his head pressed the pillow, and sleep, wooed by exhaustion, sank upon his eyes, the subjects of his waking thoughts pursued him in the shape of dreams, we cannot say. He rose—little refreshed, more pale than usual, and with a certain haggardness of look—at seven o'clock: an hour, according to his invariable custom, was passed in his laboratory or his museum; then he sought the breakfast-table—and afterwards the promised interview with Lord Saxondale took place.

It was about noon; and Dr. Ferney's carriage was in readiness to convey him to some place where he intended to call,—when a handsome equipage drew up near the house; a short stout elderly individual alighted—and on being shown up to the physician's drawing-room, gave the name of the Marquis of Eagledean. Dr. Ferney had just terminated a long conversation which he held alone with Lord Saxondale: he was anxious to go out—and he could have gladly dispensed with the necessity of receiving a visit professionally. Nevertheless, he was a man of too much courtesy to refuse to see the nobleman who thus called; and he therefore hastened to the drawing-room. He had no previous acquaintance with the Marquis of Eagledean—indeed, had scarcely ever heard of him: for few persons in Dr. Ferney's sphere of life had less knowledge than he of high names and sounding titles,—those only being familiar to his ear with the owners of which he professionally came in contact.

"I hope I am not intruding, Dr. Ferney, upon your more important duties," began the Marquis; "but I wish to speak to you on a subject in which I am more or less interested; and I am induced to address myself to you, having recently read in a scientific publication of certain wondrous discoveries you have made in the branch of chemistry."

Dr. Ferney bowed in acknowledgement of the compliment thus implied; and the Marquis of Eagledean went on.

"I must briefly observe, Dr. Ferney, that by certain means, a small phial—containing, I believe, an active poison — recently fell into my hands——"

"Ah, indeed!" murmured the physician, horrible associations and even fears springing up in his mind: for he instantaneously thought of that phial which Lady Saxondale had stolen from him, and with which she had done such murderous work.

"Yes—that is my belief," continued the Marquis, imagining that Dr. Ferney had merely become interested in a philosophic sense in what he was saying; and not for a moment suspecting that he was smitten with any deeper feeling. "I was at first inclined to try the effect upon some animal —such as a cat or a rabbit: but I had not the heart to do so: and as I have something more than a sentiment of mere curiosity urging me on, I resolved to bring the phial to you, that you may either at once confirm my belief, or else submit the fluid to an experimental process."

While the Marquis of Eagledean was thus speaking, the physician nerved himself with all his fortitude to meet whatsoever revelation might further be made: for the conviction was settling in his mind that it was the stolen phial, with the poison of his own elimination, which was about to be produced. Perhaps it was because the image of Lady Saxondale was so completely uppermost in his mind, and because certain new impressions relative to her character had just been made upon him during his conversation with her son,—perhaps, we say, it was for these reasons that a phial of active poison, accidentally falling into another person's hands, should so immediately identify itself in his imagination with the one pilfered from him by her ladyship.

"Here it is," said the Marquis of Eagledean; and the physician's apprehension was confirmed it was his own phial—and he full well knew the deadly properties of the liquid it contained!

"My lord," he answered, "I feel honoured and flattered by the compliment you pay me by thus appealing to whatsoever little scientific knowledge I may possess in this matter. I am sure your lordship will not take it to be offensive, when I state that I am particularly pressed for time to-day: my

carriage, as you may have observed, is waiting at the door——"

"I beseech, Dr. Ferney," exclaimed the Marquis, rising from the chair, "that you will not put yourself to any inconvenience on my account. I will leave the phial with you. In a few days I shall be in London again; and I will do myself the pleasure of calling. Meanwhile you will perhaps examine the contents."

"I will, my lord—I will," responded the physician, with a nervousness which he could not altogether subdue, but which the Marquis merely took to be the impatience of one who was sorely pressed for time.

Lord Eagledean accordingly departed forthwith.

"Thank heavens! this tell-tale phial and this fatal fluid have come back again into my hands:" —it was thus that Ferney murmured to himself when he was once more alone: then hastening to his laboratory, he secured the bottle in a cupboard amongst other chemical preparations.

The physician having done this, descended to his carriage, and ordered the coachman to drive to Saxondale House. The mistress of the mansion was at home; and Dr. Ferney was invited to ascend to the drawing-room where she was seated. As he followed the footman thither, he lingered somewhat on the stairs in order to compose his feelings ere once more finding himself in the presence of that woman who for long, long years he had so fondly loved, but whom he knew to be a murderess! He entered the apartment with a look of mingled mournfulness and severity,—mournfulness because he reflected that one whom he had thus cherished as the idol of his soul's worship, and whose beauty was so magnificent, was deeply criminal; and severity, because he felt the necessity of exercising as strong a control as possible over his own emotions, in order that Lady Saxondale might not think he could in any way sympathise with the black deed which he had nevertheless promised to retain inviolably secret.

The moment the footman announced his name, her ladyship gave a sudden start—but so slight to outward appearance, as not to be noticed by the lacquey; and instantaneously recovering her self-possession, she assumed her most affable air—her most winning look—as she advanced to greet the physician with an affected effusion of warmest friendship. She seized both his hands before he could possibly anticipate that movement on her part, or avoid it if he had wished; and bending upon him the whole power of her brilliant eyes, she said, "My dear Dr. Ferney, you know not how rejoiced I am to behold you beneath this roof."

The physician had come prepared to remonstrate—to argue—to upbraid—to dictate: but all his resolves were melting away beneath the ineffable spell which that woman had the power of wielding over him. And she too—subtle being that she was—knew full well the mighty force of this influence which she possessed. She had divined at once that he came for no agreeable purpose; and whatever it were, she sought to disarm him beforehand of any resentment that might have been provoked, or of any sense of duty which remorseful or scrupulous feelings might have re-awakened,—in a word, to neutralize at once whatsoever aim he might have in view, if hostile to her own interests. Still, therefore, did she bend upon him the full blaze of her magnificent eyes,—throwing into that flood of lustre a degree of tenderness which from those orbs had never shone upon him before: so that he was dazzled and bewildered—he felt his head turning as if with intoxication—while the contact of her warm fair hands, which still grasped his own, increased this inebriety of the senses.

"Now, my dear friend—my best and most esteemed friend," said Lady Saxondale, "come and sit by me, and tell me what has procured for me the pleasure of this visit: because I know full well that your time is so devoted to professional and scientific pursuits, it is not a mere complimentary call you are making."

Dr. Ferney felt ashamed of himself at having yielded, even though it were only for a few moments, to the inebriating influences of Lady Saxondale's beauty. He literally writhed beneath the humiliating idea of his weakness:—the sense of that duty which he had to perform, acquired power in his mind;—again did his look become mournfully severe; and rising from the sofa where she had made him sit down, he stood before her—folded his arms across his breast—and said, "Lady, I must forget the past so far as it regards my own heart. Would to God that I could likewise forget all the incidents which, belonging unto that past, have been so deplorably connected with *you!*"

"Are you come to upbraid me for what cannot be recalled?" asked Lady Saxondale in a voice of melancholy reproach,—while inwardly she was frightened at the look and manner of the physician, who seemed as if he had at length escaped from the fascinating influence of her image, or was enabled to exert sufficient moral power to throw that influence off. "Tell me my dear friend—are you come to upbraid me," she repeated, "for those things which, having been done, cannot be undone?"

"That is not altogether my object," replied the physician, as he still stood before her with folded arms. "Oh! how is it, Lady Saxondale," he cried, with a sudden access of excitement, "that you, whom I have loved so long and with so sublime a worship, should have proved mine evil genius? Woman, I feel that my conscience is blackened with crimes on account of you! The world looks upon me as one who leads a pure and stainless life—as a man too enthusiastically devoted to the noble art which he professes to have thought, or leisure, or opportunity for anything beside. The world looks upon my countenance—beholds it pensively serene—and imagines that if there be any wrinkles there, they have been traced by closest study and by vigils of research: but little is it deemed how deep a remorse my soul now cherishes!"

As the physician went on speaking, dire apprehensions gathered and strengthened in the mind of Lady Saxondale; and she felt that she must exercise all her arts, all her wiles—and bring into play all her powers of fascination and cajolery, to level that man once more in submissiveness and blind obedience to her feet.

"Dr. Ferney," she answered, rendering the cadences of her voice as musically mournful and tenderly melting as she possibly could, "know you not that I am already the unhappiest of women, and that it would take but little to make me grasp the

dagger or imbibe the poison of a desperate suicide? And will you, Dr. Ferney—you whom I have looked upon as my best and dearest friend—you for whom I have perhaps entertained a feeling which reciprocates your own, but the existence of which I have never until this moment confessed to your ears,—will *you*, I ask, take any step that shall help to drive me to that fearful consummation?"

"O my God!" exclaimed Ferney, pressing his hand to his wildly throbbing brows, "is it possible that you do really love me?——No, no—I cannot believe it! You tell me so now for reasons of your own: for, alas! alas! I cannot blind myself to the fact that you are a woman whose soul is a compound of duplicities and treacheries—you are a woman stained with crimes—possessing a fiend's capacity for mischief under the guise of that grand and glorious beauty! And I too," continued Dr. Ferney," with passionate vehemence,—"I too have been rendered, though heaven knows how unconsciously at the time, an accomplice in the stupendous fraud which you have perpetrated!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, becoming white as a sheet, and her lips livid, as she half-started from the sofa: "would you allude to that mystery?—would you allude to it, I ask? Remember your solemn pledge—that whatever its nature might be, it is *my* secret, and you would never make the slightest attempt to penetrate it!"

"But what, Lady Saxondale," responded the physician, fixing his eyes penetratingly upon her, "if accident should have brought about circumstances leading to a thorough revelation of the motive?"

"Enough, enough!" murmured Lady Saxondale, in a hoarse voice: "there may be listeners!"—and starting from the sofa, she sped to the door of the apartment. "No—fortunately we are unheard by others," she said, having opened the door and looked forth.

"See, unfortunate woman," remarked the physician, "what it is to have a guilty conscience. A single word flying out from within these four walls, may be like a spark to a mass of gunpowder, and cause an explosion of all the fabrics of duplicity and crime you have built up,—burying yourself in the ruins!"

"Now, Dr. Ferney," said Lady Saxondale, approaching close up to him, and laying her hand upon his arm, while she looked with tender entreaty into his countenance,—"I beseech you to sit down by my side—throw off this strange manner which you wear—speak to me as a friend—but speak in whispers,—and tell me what has occurred, that you have come thus to upbraid me now?"

The physician suffered himself to be so far persuaded that he did sit down by Lady Saxondale's side upon the sofa; and for a moment an expression of triumph appeared upon her countenance: for she felt confident that whatsoever had transpired, the physician was still to a certain degree within the silken trammels which love had woven about his heart.

"Listen to me, Lady Saxondale," he said, not daring to look at her as he spoke: for he again felt the magical influence of her charms. "I have several subjects to touch upon. In the first place, that phial of deadly poison—that phial which you took from my laboratory—how came it in the possession of the Marquis of Eagledean?"

"What!" ejaculated her ladyship, amazed at the new turn which the physician's discourse had thus abruptly taken: "are you acquainted with the Marquis?"

"Never before this day. He brought me the phial for analyzation——"

"And you have kept it? you have kept it?" interrupted Lady Saxondale, eagerly.

"Oh, yes indeed! I have kept it!" answered the physician: "and never more shall it quit my possession."

"No—keep it, keep it—destroy it—or at all events give it not back to the hands of the Marquis of Eagledean."

"Ah! unhappy woman, I comprehend!" said Dr. Ferney, an expression of renewed anguish sweeping over his countenance: "it is the evidence of some fresh crime which you are thus desirous should be withholden from the hands of the Marquis."

"Solemnly do I swear," quickly responded her ladyship, "that no fresh crime has been consummated."

"What, then, am I to think?" asked the physician:—"that it was meditated, but that it failed? Oh, my heavens! is it all a dream? or is it a hideous reality? Can one of such splendid beauty as yourself be so darkly criminal?"

"Spare me—spare me!—continue not these bitter upbraidings!" murmured Lady Saxondale: and seising the physician's hand, she held it between both her own. "Now tell me what else has transpired?"

"Lord Saxondale," answered Ferney, slowly withdrawing his hand, and looking her ladyship full in the face, "is an inmate of my house."

"Of your house?" she repeated: "of your house?"—and she gased in a sort of wild astonishment upon Ferney. "What means this? what circumstances have brought it about? Are you resolved to ruin me? have you got him there to serve such a purpose? Oh, am I deceived in you? are you no longer my friend? do you hate me now? Why—why seek to drive me to distraction?"

"Calm yourself, Lady Saxondale—calm yourself, if you can," answered the physician, alarmed at the terrific excitement which she had just manifested. "Edmund was last night transferred from Dr. Burdett's asylum to my house——"

At this moment the door opened; and Lady Saxondale suddenly assumed an air of composure as a domestic entered to present a letter which had just arrived. It was from Mr. Marlow, and briefly announced "that on the previous night Lord Saxondale had been carefully and secretly removed to the abode of a very eminent physician, Ferney by name, and who resided in Conduit Street." This letter was a source of infinite relief to the guilty and intriguing woman, inasmuch as it proved to her in a moment that it was through no hostile intent Dr. Ferney had become the custodian of Edmund—but that a strange coincidence in the chapter of accidents had consigned the youth to his care. Glancing round to assure herself that the domestic who brought the letter had retired, she said to Ferney, "This is from my solicitor, announcing that Edmund *is* at your house."

"And last night," responded the physician, "when Edmund slept, I entered his chamber stealthily—he awoke not—and I discovered——"

"Enough!" interrupted Lady Saxondale, in a low thick voice: "think you that I cannot comprehend your meaning? But listen to me, Dr. Ferney—listen to me! That secret is *mine*: you will not make use of it—you cannot—it would ruin yourself as well as me. Of what avail to do this?"

"Oh! think not, think not," interrupted the physician, "that I can drag on my miserable existence with this dreadful load upon my conscience! No: whatever be the results either to you or to me, I must perform an act of justice towards some one who is perhaps wronged——"

"No, no," ejaculated Lady Saxondale vehemently: "you must not—you cannot! No one is wronged! Believe me—Oh! believe me, when I solemnly assure you of this. I am at your mercy: not merely my character, but my life is in your hands. Now, Dr. Ferney—be your decision promptly given: for I will submit two alternatives for your consideration. The first is, that if you will spare me—if you will continue to keep the seal of utter silence upon your lips in respect to all the past—I will be everything to you! I will be your slave—your mistress—your paramour: I will submit myself to you—I will clasp you in my embrace—I will return you a thousand-fold that love which you have so long borne towards me! That is one alternative. The other is this:—if you tell me *now* that on going hence it is for the purpose of avowing everything and laying bare all that I have conjured you to conceal, I will seek my own chamber—and there will I plunge a sharp-pointed knife deep down into this bosom which covers a tortured heart!"

As she thus spoke with a vehemence which was more or less assumed, Lady Saxondale suddenly tore open the front of her dress and revealed the snowy grandeur of her bust. The deed was an exquisite piece of acting, and had an air perfectly natural. It was the crowning act of *finesse* on the part of this wily woman. At the same time she threw so much frantic wildness into the expression of her countenance, as to confirm the belief on the physician's part that the proceeding was all unstudied,—so that he *did* imagine he beheld before him a woman goaded to the very verge of desperation.

But in one sense Lady Saxondale had mistaken Dr. Ferney's disposition. Believing that the love he had cherished for her was allied with sensuous passion, she thought to subdue him altogether, and by bringing him into her arms, enchain him more firmly than ever to her interests; and in order to accomplish this, the unprincipled woman was prepared to abandon herself to him. But she smote him only with pity and commiseration—not with maddening passion.

"Lady Saxondale," he said, gazing upon her countenance with an expression ineffably compassionate, and not upon that bared bosom with desire,—"you know me not—you understand me not! Were you not thus frantic—thus driven to desperation—I should consider that you had insulted me to the most painful degree. Adjust your raiment, I beseech of you!"—and he suddenly averted his eyes.

Lady Saxondale hastened to do his bidding, for she feared lest some one should enter: but still she saw that her empire over the physician was regained through the medium of the pity with which he was inspired, if not by the passion which she had sought to excite. Little, however, did it matter to her how he had become enmeshed again in her silken chains, so long as he was thus rendered captive.

"Yes—you have misunderstood me," he went on to observe: "you have not rightly comprehended my character. For nineteen long years have I loved you—but with a love the holiest, the chastest, the purest. Alas! I feel that this love is stronger than myself: it has become interwoven with the very principles of my existence. Were you a fiend in female shape, I must still love you all the same: the interview of this hour proves to me that it is so! I came to give you the positive assurance that I would perform an act of duty at all and any risk: and, behold! I am weak and powerless, disarmed, unnerved, in your presence. No, no," he continued, in a voice tremulous with emotion, and almost as if he in his turn had become a suppliant, "I conjure you not to lay violent hands upon yourself! Oh, not for worlds would I sully the purity of that love—the sanctity of that adoration—which I have experienced for you! You yourself may be the foulest and uncleanest wretch alive: but my love has been a worship—and it shall not be polluted. I will not sell my compassion for the enjoyment of your charms: I shudder at the idea of compelling you to abandon yourself to my embraces as the price of your security. I will not hurt a single hair of your head. No—by heaven, no! I will drag about with me my remorse as a prisoner drags his chain: the dread secrets of which my heart is a depositary, may eat like iron into that heart—may corrode every fine feeling there—may cover with rust the brightest sentiments of my soul: but still I will not seek relief for that harrowed conscience by betraying *you!* I will be a criminal—I will do anything sooner than drive you to despair. See, Lady Saxondale—see, Harriet—what a power you wield over me!——Oh, I shudder when I think of it—and yet do I kiss the chain!"

It is impossible to convey to the reader an idea of those highly-wrought feelings which inspired the physician as he thus gave vehement utterance to that long and partially broken speech. *There* was a man naturally endowed with the noblest sentiments and loftiest thoughts—a man of splendid genius and brilliant intellect—a man who within himself possessed every element of virtue, and who amongst the good of this world might have shone as the best,—*there* was this man, we say, altered, —changed,—with feelings distorted, sentiments warped, mind made morbid, soul rendered attenuate,—and all by the indomitable influence of the love which he cherished! And this man too, while consenting to become the accomplice of crime as he had already been made its agent,—here was this man, with what may be termed the idiosyncracy of virtue, refusing the recompense of vice—allowing his love to render him criminal, and yet having strength of mind to reject the reward which he might have grasped! Truly such a love as this exists not often in the world,—a love that could keep itself chaste

and holy while prompting him who possessed it to trample upon all the scruples of conscience!

"My dear friend—my ever dear friend," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, in a tone of joyous enthusiasm when she saw how completely he was vanquished, "you have inspired me with new life. Oh, I must embrace you as a friend——only as a friend!"

"No, Harriet," responded the physician, abruptly rising and retreating from her: "it must not be so. To me at least you shall never appear in the light of a wanton. But now with regard to that unfortunate young man. This morning I have discoursed with him for a long time; and on my soul! it were unjust to keep him captive for another minute."

"What!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale; "after this mad alliance which he has formed——"

"And yet he is not mad," answered Ferney.

"He *is* mad, I tell you!" rejoined her ladyship vehemently: "even your own science may sometimes err. At all events I conjure you to keep him for a day or two until I shall have had time to see those who must be consulted in this matter. My dear friend, you must do nothing by halves: my interests guide me in all my proceedings——I will explain no more now. You have promised me much: is it too great a tax upon your friendship——"

"Good heavens!" murmured Ferney, almost wringing his hands as he spoke; "if you bade me sell my soul to Satan, I should obey! Edmund shall remain captive at my house."

With these words the physician turned abruptly away, and quitted the room.

The moment the door closed behind him, an expression of exultant satisfaction appeared upon the countenance of Lady Saxondale, and rising from her seat, she surveyed herself in the mirror. She had indeed good reason to be proud of her magnificent beauty; for by the power thereof she had triumphed over all the virtuous scruples of a man who was naturally good, but who under the influence of his fatal love was prepared to sell his very soul to Satan rather than harm a hair of her head.

But when turning away from that mirror, and when the first flush of thrilling exultation was past, Lady Saxondale could not help feeling—and deeply feeling too—that many and great difficulties lay before her. It was impossible that Edmund could be left at Dr. Ferney's. His presence there would sooner or later re-awaken remorse in the physician's conscience; and the next time it was so, he might go and act at once under a sudden impulse, and without first coming to warn her of his intentions. Edmund must therefore be removed. But whither? This Lady Saxondale at present knew not. She however made up her mind to call personally on Dr. Burdett, and give him her own instructions without sending them through Marlow. For a few days, she felt convinced, it would be safe enough to leave Edmund where he was: and in the meantime she could make new as well as effective arrangements for his future keeping.

CHAPTER CXXXV.

A CHAPTER OF LOVE.

On the same day, and at the same hour when the preceding scene took place, we shall find the beautiful Angela Deveril seated by the bedside of Madge Somers at the villa near the Regent's Park. The woman lay sleeping: her countenance was hideously pale—and her strongly marked features had become more peaked and angular, likewise as a result of the all but fatal illness which had followed the murderous assault she had sustained at the hands of Chiffin the Cannibal.

And, Oh! what a contrast did that counte nance form with the lovely face of her who was watching in the room. For Angela was assuredly the most lovely of all the lovely females who have crowded upon the stage of this narrative; and certainly the world never presented a more ravishing embodiment of female charms. The dark dress that she wore, was fastened up to the throat: but the bust which it so modestly concealed, displayed its own rounded contours by defining as it were the shape and set of the *corsage* of that dress. Tall and slender, without leanness—on the contrary, with all the proportions justly modelled—her figure blended elastic litheness with graceful elegance. No longer now did the short drapery of the dancer display the rounded symmetry and straightness of the lower limbs: but still their sweeping length might be traced beneath the folds of her present raiment;—and when she rose to tread lightly across the room for any purpose, the exquisitely-shaped feet might be seen, and perhaps a glimpse caught of the delicate ankles. Her shining dark hair waved in ringlets about her classic head, and drooped upon the sloping shoulders. As the light from the window fell upon that hair, it seemed to crown that head as with a glory, so rich was the velvet gloss of those dark masses. The dazzling purity and transparency of her complexion was described in one of the earliest chapters: nor less was justice then done to the large dark eyes, so full of fire,—not the fire of sensuous passion, like that which floods the saloons of pleasure; but a fire, holy, pure, and ineffably bright, like that which burns upon an altar in a temple. Yes—ravishingly beautiful and beyond all description lovely, was Angela Deveril—but not less amiable and virtuous than physically enchanting.

If we peep into the room on the occasion specifically mentioned, we shall observe that there was a slight expression of pensiveness, not exactly merging into mournfulness, on the lovely countenance of Angela Deveril. The coral lips were slightly apart, affording a glimpse of teeth which it is a poor simile to liken either unto ivory or to pearls; for they outshone both,—the first in the purity of their whiteness, the last in their exquisite enamel. Her eyes were partially bent downward,—thus showing to the utmost advantage the lines of long, thick, silken lashes which fringed them. Yes—she was reflecting somewhat seriously perhaps, but not in a melancholy strain: for the young heart, when beating with its first love, has more of hope than fear blended therewith; and even while scarcely conscious of the real na-

ture of the feeling, yet does it experience and appreciate its luxury.

Of whom was Angela thinking? and had she settled herself thus to think of some one? or had his image stolen insensibly and unconsciously into her mind? Yes—it was so. For when the soul has become an elysium of love, it does not at once purposely and deliberately light itself up with the silver lamps which shed a soft and perfumed lustre around; but gradually and of its own accord, as if by magic power, does the gentle flood of roseate light pour in, to reveal the image which the heart has enshrined there. Thus was it with Angela. Her patient had fallen off to sleep: the young maiden had at first taken her embroidery; but feeling a disinclination for it—she scarcely knew why—she had taken a book:—then, still without knowing why, she could not settle her attention upon its pages; and thus she had abandoned embroidery—she had abandoned book—and gradually fell into a certain train of thought, which, as we before observed, had for her a certain serene and sweet luxury, greater than either the recreation of embroidery or book.

Young Cupid, the God of Love, though but a mere boy, is not without the most cunning experience: he knows full well the nature of every heart with which he has to deal. Into that which is characterized by strong passions, and belongs to a fervid and glowing temperament, he sometimes rushes precipitately, confident of being enabled to take the citadel by storm, without resistance, and enthrone himself in empire there. In the heart, too, where the feelings, though untainted by sensuousness, are nevertheless susceptible as the sensitive plant and move to the slightest touch—or as the Æolian harp, which acknowledges the sway of the slightest zephyr,—therein likewise does young Cupid frequently alight with a sudden bound, giving no warning of his approach. All this constitutes what is called love at first sight: but it is not always the most permanent. For an empire that is easily won, sooner or later satiates its conqueror with the very glory of his triumph: and so does young Cupid sometimes vanish away from certain hearts as abruptly as he entered them. But very different is it with that heart where the feelings lie deep—where modesty, and innocence, and artlessness constitute barriers preventing them from being too accessible to tender influences, and yet properly sensitive in respect to all generous sympathies,—where the passions lie still deeper down, kept in subjection by the same defences, and beyond the reach of undue provocatives. Into such a heart as this young Cupid cannot plunge headlong: he cannot take it by storm. Were he to make the endeavour, his presence would shock instead of pleasing: he would be recoiled from as an insolent intruder; and with drooping wings would be compelled to turn in humiliation away. Full well does Cupid know all this; and therefore, with characteristic cunning, he enters stealthily and silently—he makes no noise—he breathes not a syllable—no, not even the name of him on whose part he comes: he flutters not his wings—he twangs not his bow—he proceeds gradiently and cautiously, like an army that enters by surprise into the midst of a fortalice in the depth of night. Then—even when the entry is made and the admission is obtained—Cupid goes not roughly on, as a man pushes his way through a dense forest, rudely thrusting aside the opposing boughs and snapping perhaps some of the branches: but he proceeds as one makes his way through a parterre of flowers in a lovely garden, gently and delicately picking his path amidst the floral beauties, so as to trample upon none—to break none—nor so much as to bruise a single slender stalk, nor to shake off one single quivering rose-leaf. And having gained the depth of such a heart as this, young Cupid still plays a prudential part: he does not raise a shout—proclaim a name—set up an image—and call upon that heart's feelings to fall down in worship at once. No—he does not immediately make his presence known: he settles himself there; and he begins lightly and delicately to whisper to those feelings, that they may begin to vibrate softly and gently, as the leaves of a grove are faintly waved by the first kissing and wooing of the evening breeze. Thus is it by gradual steps and slow proceedings that Cupid makes his presence known in the heart to whose depths he has been compelled so stealthily to enter.

And so it was with Angela Deveril. In her young heart did Cupid sit: there had he enthroned himself—and she only just beginning to be conscious of his presence! There too had he set up an image—and she scarcely daring to admit to herself that she had caught the name of the idol which young Cupid, in soft and gentle whisperings, was calling upon her to worship! And that image—was it not the image of Francis Paton?

But let us return to the thread of our narrative. Madge Somers slept; and Angela Deveril was seated in that room which the woman had occupied ever since the evening when Chiffin's knife dealt her a blow which had so nearly proved fatal. The reader has learnt, from certain communications made by Lady Saxondale to Lord Harold Staunton, how Madge Somers had all along remained deprived of the faculty of speech—how, after consciousness had returned, she showed by signs that she had upon her mind something whereof she yearned to unburthen herself—and how she had sought to write afterwards upon a slate, but had not been able. Therefore William and Angela knew full well that the secret she had to impart was of no ordinary moment—but that it was one of vast importance: though what, they could not possibly conjecture. They ministered unto her with the most unwearying attention,—not merely because they felt that her's was a life which, involving such a secret, was of importance to themselves—but likewise because they possessed hearts of the sublimest generosity. A nurse had from the very first been engaged to watch by night; and when this attendant snatched a few hours of necessary rest during the day, Angela took her place. We must not forget to mention that William Deveril was a constant visitor at Lady Macdonald's house in Cavendish Square; and frequent also were the visits which her ladyship and Florina paid to Angela at the villa. The closest intimacy—the sweet intimacy of sisters—had sprung up between the charming Florina and the ravishing Angela: while Lady Macdonald, though in many respects a worldly-minded woman, had conceived an almost maternal love for William Deveril's beauteous sister.

Angela, then, as we have said, was seated in the sick chamber on the occasion to which we particularly refer. Her brother had gone to pay his wonted visit in Cavendish Square: but he was to return soon,—for though devoted to her who was to be his bride, yet he never neglected his sister. Indeed, who that knew her, could neglect her? An angel in beauty and in mind as well as in name, this charming heroine of our's was one whom it was impossible to treat with coldness.

There she was seated; and insensibly her thoughts had settled upon the image of Francis Paton,—when presently Madge Somers awoke. It was strange to behold the earnest gratitude and affection which mingled in that woman's countenance, as she turned her eyes upon Angela. The lion, it is said,—forgetting his ferocity as regal ruler of the forest,—will crouch down at the feet of an immaculate virgin; and assuredly the influence of Angela's kindness had subdued the fierce feelings and melted the hardened callousness of this woman's heart. Doubtless she felt that she owed her life to the ministrations of the young maiden; and having passed through as it were the very entrance of the valley of death itself, only to be drawn forth by that fair angel-hand, she would have been something less or something more than human if she had not thus felt and appreciated the true Christian sympathy and tender compassion which had influenced Miss Deveril's conduct towards her. The moment she awoke, Angela arose from her seat; and approaching the bed, bent over the invalid; and in the sweetest tones of her fluid voice asked whether she felt refreshed by the few hours of slumber she had enjoyed? Madge Somers made an affirmative sign, accompanied by another look of ineffable gratitude; and Angela presented her with some cooling beverage. When Madge had imbibed a small quantity, she made a sign that she wished to write.

"No," answered Angela; "I dare not give you the slate. Recollect," she continued, with the sweetest deprecating look, "how you fainted the other day when you endeavoured to write—and how positively the doctor ordered that you were not to be permitted to make the attempt again."

But Madge Somers repeated the sign, accompanying it with that imperiousness and petulance of motion which invalids often show when the faculty of speech is temporarily lost; and as Angela again spoke her objections—but in the sweetest manner—the woman's countenance exhibited great distress. Angela knew not exactly what to do. On the one hand she was afraid of irritating or exciting the invalid by a refusal; and moreover she was naturally anxious to learn what the important secret was, which so closely concerned her brother. But, on the other hand, the orders of the medical man were imperative. Madge Somers perceived Miss Deveril's hesitation; and as if determined to profit by it, repeated her signal more imperiously than before. Angela could no longer refuse: but she resolved that at the slightest evidence which the woman might show of faintness and weakness, she would compel her to desist. She therefore gave her the slate; and by gently propping her up with pillows, placed her in a position the most convenient for the task which the invalid had undertaken.

Joy and satisfaction lighted up the countenance of Madge Somers as she thus received the slate; and the look which she bent upon Angela Deveril, was as much as to say that if she could only unburthen herself of the secret that lay upon her mind, she would no longer dread a relapse which might lead to death. Having flung that look, she evidently mustered all her energies for the purpose which she had undertaken; and the young damsel, helping to sustain her, watched Madge Somers with no small degree of anxiety and suspense. Oh! if the secret, whatever it might be, were about to be made known? Oh! if, when William returned, she could show him that secret pencilled upon the slate? Madge Somers began to write: slowly and painfully did she form a few letters; her hand trembled so that the strokes she made were all irregular and wavy. With increasing suspense and anxiety did Miss Deveril watch her: but by the time she had written these words—"*William Deveril is the s*——" a sudden faintness came over her. Angela snatched the slate from her hands: and here the task terminated.

Madge did not swoon off completely; but for upwards of a quarter of an hour she was as if about to faint away. When she recovered somewhat, she made a sign to have the slate again: but this time Angela was decisive, and would not consent. The invalid submitted; and soon afterwards relapsed into slumber. William Deveril now returned home from his visit to Cavendish Square; and Angela showed him the writing upon the slate. They were both lost in conjecture as to what the completion of the sentence might have been, when a carriage rolled up to the front of the villa—and the Marquis of Eagledean was speedily announced. To his lordship the writing was also shown; but he was no better able to guess what would have been the sequence, than were his two young friends.

"It is no use for us to waste our time," he said, "with ineffectual imaginings: in a very short while the woman will either be able to complete the sentence by writing it, or to communicate her meaning verbally. Until then we must have patience. Now, my young friends, I will tell you wherefore I call upon you thus unexpectedly today. We are all longing to have you at Edenbridge; and really we can postpone the pleasure no longer. You, Angela, will make yourself ill by too constant watching in the sick-room: you must have change of air, even if it be only for a couple of days. Now, what I propose is that you both come with me at once into Kent. You have faithful and trustworthy servants who will see that the invalid is duly cared for; and the nurse is a respectable, honest-minded woman. Not for a moment would I counsel you to leave the unfortunate creature, if I were not assured that she would be well ministered unto during your absence. It shall only be for a couple or three days, if you will: but come you must. You, William, sit down and pen a hasty note to Florina: tell her that I have carried you off. And you, Angela, give orders to your maid to pack up at once whatsoever things you intend to take with you."

"But, my lord," responded Angela, "the poor woman up-stairs will miss me so much, that I am really afraid——"

"She would miss you much more, my dear

Angela," interrupted the Marquis, "if you were to be laid up for the want of air."

"But I can assure your lordship I take sufficient exercise," rejoined the damsel. "Every evening I accompany William for a walk——"

"Well," continued the Marquis, laughing, "I certainly cannot say that your cheeks have lost their bloom: but still I feel convinced that the air of Edenbridge will do you good. Now, it shall only be for two clear days on this present occasion. With that understanding, will you come?"

Angela looked at William, and saw by the expression of his countenance that he felt how impossible it would be to refuse their kind benefactor's invitation: and perhaps there was a secret feeling in her own gentle heart which likewise added its influence to other circumstances, thus inducing her to assent. She hastened up-stairs; and entering the sick room, approached the bed where Madge Somers had just wakened up again.

"Do not be annoyed at what I am going to say—do not distress yourself, my poor woman, I

beseech you. I am going on a little visit to the Marquis of Eagledean for a couple of days—— only two days, I can assure you; and then you will see me here again. Meanwhile everything will continue to be done for your comfort; and on my return I hope to find you considerably improved. Farewell, then, for the present. Remember, only two days—and I shall be there again!"

It was thus that Angela spoke to the invalid woman, whose countenance at first expressed blank consternation at the intelligence,—as if she thought that those to whom her secret was to be revealed were to be separated from her altogether. But as the young damsel went on speaking, Madge's face cleared up: for she doubtless felt that it would be the height of ingratitude and selfishness to exhibit signs of displeasure at the brief interval of recreation which Angela proposed to take.

The preparations were speedily made—the fullest instructions were given to the domestics in respect to the care to be taken of Madge—the note was despatched to Florina—and William Deveril, with his sister, accompanied the Marquis of Eagledean to Edenbridge Park. There the brother and sister were most cordially welcomed by all the inmates. Mr. Hawkshaw had taken his departure: but Mrs. Leyden and Henrietta were now staying at the mansion—and thus there was a complete party.

It was on the second day after the arrival of William and Angela at Edenbridge, that the scene we are about to describe took place. Let the reader picture to himself a sumptuously-furnished room, with the casement open, and the sun shining brightly in: for although the autumn was touching upon its close, and winter was nigh at hand, the weather was unusually superb. The grape-vine which climbed up the front of that wing where this apartment was situated, was not as yet denuded of all its leaves—nor had all its clustering fruit been plucked: and although the foliage which did remain, bore the sere autumnal tints, it nevertheless proved agreeable to the eye of any one seated in that room. And whom shall we find there? The beauteous Angela—and all alone, too: for Lady Eagledean, with whom she had been conversing, was summoned forth on some pretext by the Marquis. We say *pretext*, because it was so; inasmuch as his lordship had a reason for desiring that Miss Deveril should thus be left alone for a few minutes, until a certain person might receive a hint that she was there by herself and that he might seek her if he chose.

Always beautiful—always ravishing, Angela was on this occasion more exquisitely beautiful, if possible, and more irresistibly ravishing than when we last described her. This time it was a white dress that she wore, but fastened up to the throat; for in her raiment she observed a strict virginal propriety. Her hair was in ringlets; and its darkness contrasted with the snowy drapery covering the shoulders and the neck on which those glossy ringlets showered down. The white apparel seemed to set off her exquisite shape to the fullest advantage,—making her seem even taller than she was, and enhancing the sylphid grace of her figure.

She was expecting the return of the Marchioness of Eagledean to the room, when the door opened—and instead of her ladyship, Francis Paton made his appearance. The youth, as the reader is aware, was of the same age as Angela: and we need not say that he was a perfect model of masculine beauty at that time. Indeed it would be difficult to find a more interesting pair than this which that room now contained. The colour heightened somewhat upon Angela's countenance as he made his appearance;—while on *his* cheeks it went and came in rapid transitions; and his heart fluttered like that of the most timid damsel. The reason that Miss Deveril experienced less emotion than he, was because she was totally unsuspicious of what was about to take place: whereas Frank had come with the settled purpose of avowing his love——if he had the courage.

He advanced timidly—and for a few moments was unable to give utterance to a word. At length he said murmuringly, "Miss Deveril, you return to London to-morrow. Some weeks may elapse ere we see each other again—weeks grow into months—and months constitute an age."

"I do not think, Mr. Paton," answered Angela, whose voice was likewise tremulous—and she bent down her eyes as she spoke,—"that months will elapse before I may have the pleasure of visiting your family again: because his lordship has my brother's promise that the moment the poor woman is enabled to leave our house, we are to pass some weeks with you."

"Oh, you have promised *that!*" exclaimed Francis, enthusiastic pleasure lighting up his countenance. "But still," he almost immediately added, as a partial shade came back upon his femininely handsome features, "even if you were to revisit us in a week, it would be an age all the same till you did return."

Angela knew not what to say: she felt that she was blushing—her eyes were again bent down—and for a few moments there was a pause, which if not painfully awkward, was at least full of a delicious confusion for both.

"Miss Deveril," suddenly spoke Francis, "you will not be angry with me for what I am about to say? It is with the consent of my parents that I thus address you. Miss Deveril——Angela ——I love you——Tell me, may I hope?"

Deeper grew the blush upon the maiden's cheeks—so deep that deeper it could not become; and her heart beat audibly. She could not give utterance to a word: but she extended her hand to Frank, who seizing it with rapture, pressed it to his lips. Then, sinking upon his knees at her feet, he exclaimed, "O Angela! you have made me so happy, I know not how to give expression to my feelings. But I love you——Oh! I more than love you—I worship, I adore you: and my life shall be devoted to prove the strength of my affection. I will not ask if I am indifferent to you: were I so, this hand which I hold would not have been proffered me."

"No, Frank," answered the damsel, in a low but serene voice; "you are not indifferent to me. I feel honoured and flattered——But those are cold terms; and I will say that I also am happy."

Again did Francis Paton press to his lips the fair hand which he held in his own; then he rose from his knees—the lovers approached the casement—and there for nearly an hour did they stand in sweet discourse, the pauses of which were filled up with the eloquence of their looks. They heard

not the door open; but it did—and the Marquis of Eagledean, accompanied by the Marchioness, remained for a few moments upon the threshold to contemplate that young couple who were respectively such perfect specimens of the beauty of the two sexes.

Angela was seized with confusion when Lord and Lady Eagledean approached: but Frank, enthusiastic with joy, embraced his parents in gratitude for the hint which they had given him, and the opportunity they had afforded him to avow his love,—by both of which, as the reader has seen, he failed not to profit. The Marquis and Marchioness, welcoming Angela as their future daughter-in-law, embraced her affectionately; and it was soon whispered throughout the mansion that the beautiful Miss Deveril was the destined bride of Francis Paton.

On the following day one of the Marquis's carriages bore William and Angela back to London; and when they had taken their departure, Elizabeth Paton said with an arch smile to her brother, "Now, my dear Frank, since through my intercession our dear parents have allowed you to precipitate matters somewhat and confess your love to Angela, I hope to see your spirits cheer up altogether; and instead of taking solitary rambles, that you will have the kindness to ask me to accompany you."

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

MRS. CHESTERFIELD.

It may be necessary to observe, for the benefit of some of our readers, that in the immediate vicinity of Paris stands a charming village known by the name of Auteuil—one portion of which is bordered by the Bois de Boulogne—or anglicising the term, "Boulogne Wood." In this district there are numbers of beautiful villa-residences, the gardens and pleasure-grounds of which are so well stocked with evergreens, that even in the middle of winter they have a gay appearance. There is always sufficient verdure to afford a refreshing spectacle for the eye to repose upon; and the more genial climate of France prolongs the duration of Autumn and keeps back the advance of Winter more than in the British Islands.

It is our present purpose to direct the reader's attention to one of these delightful villas in the neighbourhood we have just described; and although it was now the beginning of November, yet the view from the casements of this residence was pleasing and cheerful. There was a spacious garden attached; and in front, at a short distance, was the Bois de Boulogne. The villa thus stood in a rural seclusion; and if its site and scenery were so agreeable as the cold season approached, the reader may imagine what must be the charms of that spot in the more auspicious periods of the year. The villa belonged to an elderly Frenchman and his wife named Durand—who having saved up some little money by trading pursuits carried on in Paris, retired from business and purchased this little property with the intention of settling down there, and also with the hope of enjoying a serene old age. They had no children, and no near relations; so that when, after a time, they began to feel somewhat dull and lonely in this seclusion, after having spent the greater portion of their existence amidst the gaieties, the bustle, and the excitement of the Parisian capital, they had no one whom they could take to reside with them. Under these circumstances, and having several spare rooms in the villa, they determined to let out these apartments, either to a quiet married couple without children—or else to some single person, male or female, requiring such accommodation. Advertisements to this effect were inserted in some of the Parisian newspapers; and the first applicant whom they brought to the villa, was so pleased with the apartments, the situation of the house, and the elderly couple themselves, that she at once took up her residence there.

This was an English lady, who however spoke the French language with an almost perfect fluency. She gave the name of Mrs. Chesterfield; and stated that her husband held an important situation in India, whither he had recently repaired; but that for certain reasons she herself had not accompanied him, it being understood that she should remain in Europe until the decline of the following year, when she purposed to set off and join him in his oriental home. Mrs. Chesterfield was a lady of great beauty—apparently about two or three-and-twenty years of age—with dark hair and eyes, a delicate olive tint of complexion, and a superb figure. Her manners were sufficiently aristocratic to denote that she had moved in the highest circles—but yet so fascinating and engaging, when she thought fit to render them so, that she at once gained the good opinion of the Durands. On taking the apartments for a term of six months, she paid the entire rent in advance—thus rendering references as to respectability quite unnecessary; and indeed such was her appearance, that her bare word would readily have been taken as the surest guarantee for anything she might advance. She paid by means of a cheque on a Parisian banker, signing the name of *Augusta Chesterfield;* and when she arrived at the villa from the hotel where she had been staying, she brought trunks well filled with every variety of the handsomest and most elegant apparel. She had no maid of her own; and therefore an additional female servant was engaged by Madame Durand to attend especially on the beautiful lodger.

It soon became apparent to the elderly couple that Mrs. Chesterfield was not altogether happy; and the keen eye of Madame Durand, with a woman's power of penetration, also observed that she endeavoured to conceal whatsoever cares were gnawing at her heart. Sometimes, when Madame Durand ascended to Mrs. Chesterfield's apartment to receive orders respecting the dinner or other matters, she noticed that the lady was sitting at the window in a mood of deep abstraction—perhaps with a book resting on her lap, but her fine dark eyes gazing vacantly from the window. Then, on being addressed, she would be startled back into self-possession; but the recovery of her composure was instantaneous—and her countenance would become animated with a smile which contrasted strangely with the mournful reverie whence she had been aroused. She received no visits—appeared to have no acquaintances in Paris—and

during the first few days of her residence at the villa, received but one letter, which was in a beautiful female hand, and bore the English postmark.

It was the same day on which Mrs. Chesterfield received this letter, that after having perused it, she went forth to walk in the Bois de Boulogne. The weather was serene and beautiful for that season of the year; and the sun was shining brightly in a climate where such mists and fogs as those which are familiar to the dwellers in the British capital, are almost entirely unknown. Mrs. Chesterfield was well but unostentatiously dressed: there was elegance without pretension in her garb—every detail of her apparel indicated the refined taste of a well-bred lady, without the slightest desire for gaudy show. Yet it was impossible that a woman of her striking beauty and gorgeous developments of shape could fail to attract attention. It was in the forenoon that she was thus rambling forth; and there were but few persons in the road intersecting the wood where she was walking. She herself was plunged in deep thought,—most probably pondering upon the contents of the letter which she had that morning received; and thus for some time she remained unconscious of having become the object of admiration and interest on the part of a young and very handsome gentleman who was mounted on a superb steed.

There was something distinguished in the appearance of this cavalier. Not only, as just stated, was he remarkably handsome and possessed all the advantages of youth—his age not exceeding that of the lady whom he was admiring—but his demeanour was exceedingly prepossessing; and there was a certain mildness in his look, which without detracting from a proper manliness of mien, bespoke an amiable disposition. He was followed by a groom in a neat and elegant livery, and who bestrode an animal well corresponding with the beauty of the steed which carried his master. It was evident by the way in which this gentleman suddenly reined in his horse on catching the first glimpse of Mrs. Chesterfield's figure, as she was walking in front, that he was at once struck by the admirable symmetry of her shape—a shape which, with an almost Hebe luxuriance, was of perfect proportions. He walked his animal until, having passed her somewhat, he was enabled to obtain a view of her countenance; and the impression made by that face, enhanced the admiration already excited by her figure. He could not immediately take his eyes off her; and she was so deeply absorbed in her own reflections, that she did not notice how attentively he was surveying her. Suddenly smitten with the conviction that his gaze was of a fixity and an ardour that might be construed into rudeness, he reluctantly averted his eyes and quickened the pace of his horse: but he could not for the life of him continue his way with the chance of losing sight of a being who had thus so suddenly taken possession of his heart. He again looked round: still she saw him not: he was enabled therefore to consider her more attentively—and he felt that this lovely unknown had, all unconsciously, become invested with a power over him which he could not possibly shake off. The longer he contemplated her, the more fervid grew his admiration. She appeared faultless in his eyes. With all the straining of hypercriticism—if he were inclined to be thus critical—he could not have wished a single feature to be otherwise than it was, nor a single contour of her shape to be differently modelled. Every one has a particular taste in respect to female beauty: every man has his own *beau ideal* of feminine charms;—and here was a being who in every way, even to the minutest detail, fulfilled that picture of loveliness which the young gentleman had often drawn in his own imagination as the one to be most worshipped and adored.

Still she beheld him not. Again he feared to be considered rude, and even grossly insulting; for she was evidently a well-bred lady—there was nothing in her appearance that could be taken as an encouragement for libertine advances;—and absorbed in thought as she now seemed, it was utterly impossible to perceive in her demeanour the faintest approximation to an overture. But that very pensiveness on her part excited the interest and piqued the curiosity of him who was thus admiring her. Already enamoured of her beauty, he longed to know who she was: he longed likewise to ascertain wherefore she was thus plunged in melancholy thought. He could not therefore hurry away from the spot where she was walking; and yet, if he thus continued reining in his own impatient steed so as not to outstrip her pace, and at the same time keeping his looks so fervently fixed upon her, he would be guilty of a rudeness which was altogether at variance with his sense of good breeding. Reluctantly therefore was he compelled to ride onward; but at a little distance he halted again, and looked back. She had turned—she was retracing her way: the idea of losing sight of her was not to be endured. At any risk he must know more of her: so he turned likewise—and again walking his horse, soon overtook the object of his admiration.

Suddenly she raised her eyes, and beheld his own fixed thus ardently upon her. Her lips, riper and redder than the most luscious of fruit, were slightly apart: he could discern the dazzling brilliancy of her teeth—he saw that she was indeed perfect in every feature, faultlessly fulfilling his own *beau ideal* of feminine beauty. She averted her eyes—it struck him, with a flush of dignified indignation upon her countenance; and she at once turned into a diverging pathway, which could not be pursued by any one on horseback. He reined in his steed to a halt; and sat for a few moments in the saddle irresolute how to act. But promptly making up his mind, he sprang to the ground; and as the groom immediately galloped up, he abandoned his horse to the man's charge,—quickly striking into the same path which the lady had entered.

In a few minutes he was by her side. Mrs. Chesterfield neither looked to the right nor to the left—nor quickened nor slackened her pace—but continued her way with an air as if she were ignorant that she had thus been followed; or else with the modest self-possession of a virtuous woman who chose not to give the slightest encouragement to libertine boldness. The young gentleman longed to address her, but dared not: he passed on—and when a few yards in front, looked back. Mrs. Chesterfield at once turned into another pathway,—so that if he now retraced

his own way and followed her, there would be something unmistakably pointed in the proceeding. For a few moments he again stood irresolute: he thought to himself that this was decidedly no adventure offering him any encouragement to persevere with it;—and yet it seemed as if his whole happiness were at stake, so great was the empire which her charms had within a short half-hour established over his heart. He was however no frivolous-minded young man, such as Lord Saxondale: he possessed a loftier intelligence—and yet he had not the moral power to fling off the thraldom which had thus so suddenly enchained him in its meshes.

With a sort of desperate resolve he pursued the lady: he passed her again—he looked round—but with a gaze of the most respectful admiration; and perceiving that she stopped suddenly, as if sorely offended, and was then about to turn and retrace her own way, he accosted her without farther hesitation.

"For heaven's sake do not be angry, madam!" he said, in a tone of earnest entreaty. "Not for worlds would I give you offence!"

He spoke in the French language, which was his own native tongue; and his looks were full of a deprecating tenderness, as much as to implore that his words and conduct might be favourably interpreted. Mrs. Chesterfield bent the full power of her dark eyes upon him: there was mingled anger and curiosity in that look; and as he thus beheld her close, he saw no need to alter the opinion he had already formed of the dazzling splendour of her beauty.

"If you would not offend me, sir," she answered, after a few moments' pause, "you will at once proceed on your own way and leave me to follow mine:"—and as she also spoke in the French language, it was with that slight foreign accent which proved that France was not her native land.

"My way is yours," returned the young gentleman: "for you lead me by a silken chain from which there is no possibility of self-extrication."

"This, sir," rejoined Mrs. Chesterfield, in a dignified manner, "is not the age of romance, and you are not a knight-errant, with a prescriptive privilege to throw yourself at the feet of any lady whom you may encounter."

"No," he quickly responded, rejoiced at having so far succeeded as to hold her in discourse: "but though the age of knight-errantry may have passed away, the admiration which is due to feminine beauty belongs to all time—and love is confined not to a particular century, but is coeval with eternity itself."

A scarcely perceptible smile appeared upon the rich red lips of Mrs. Chesterfield,—not exactly a smile of scorn nor of anger, but one which was evidently called up by the ingenuity of her persevering admirer's repartee; and his heart glowed with a still deeper fervour, in satisfaction at not having experienced a farther and more pointed repulse.

"You are an English lady," he said. "Not only do I judge by your accents that such is the fact, fluently though you speak my own native language,—but England alone of all European countries can produce such a specimen of grand beauty as yourself."

"I do not thank you, sir, for this compliment," answered Mrs. Chesterfield; "because I hate flattery—and moreover you are holding me in conversation against my will. Decide which path you purpose to take: the other direction will be mine."

"Is it possible that you are resolved to view my conduct with such severity?" he exclaimed, still in a tone and manner of earnest entreaty: and so truly handsome did he appear at the moment, that even the most virtuous female heart could not have remained altogether untouched,—especially as there was nothing of the rakish libertine's insolence in his looks; but the admiration he displayed was invested with the profoundest respect. "I have already implored you not to take offence. At least permit me the pleasure of conversing with you for a few minutes longer."

"If for a few minutes, wherefore not for an hour?" demanded the lady, with a slight and scarcely perceptible archness of look: and as her countenance instantaneously became serious again, she added, "Not for an hour—and therefore not even for another moment."

Thus speaking, she turned and pursued her way quickly. The young Frenchman felt bewildered and excited to almost a maddening degree: the brief discourse already holden with her, had rivetted the power of her charms: her voice, rich and full-toned without in the slightest degree transgressing the bounds of feminine harmony, had sunk like a ravishing music into his soul. It was impossible that he could tear himself away: he almost felt as if some slight advantage were already gained; and if he were justified in so thinking, he resolved to follow it up. He was soon by her side again.

"Expend upon me all your indignation, if you will," he said, in a hurried and excited manner; "fling upon me all the lightning of your looks—set me down in your mind as the most audacious of men or the vainest of coxcombs—but enamoured as I have become of your beauty in the space, I may say, of a few brief minutes, I am resolved not to prove altogether indifferent to *you!* No—I will even force you," he added, vehemently, "to accept the homage of my heart!"

Mrs. Chesterfield once more stopped short: her splendid figure was drawn up to its fullest height: a dignified elegance characterized it: the crimson mounted to her cheeks—her nostrils dilated—her bust, already so luxuriant, seemed to expand into a still ampler volume; and her flashing looks were flung upon the audacious young Frenchman. She spoke not a word: but she gazed upon him as if to assure herself that he had indeed been bold enough to address her in that style—and perhaps also to put his courage still farther to the test, and see whether he would quail beneath that Juno-like aspect which she assumed.

"Oh! if you mean to play the goddess," he cried, in a sort of mad enthusiasm, "I will cheerfully——Oh, so cheerfully fall down at your feet in worship and adoration!"

"Do you know, sir," said the lady, with a half-supercilious, half-compassionate smile, "that I begin to think your intellects are really deranged: for there is something ludicrous in this proceeding on your part. If I were reading it in a book, I should smile over it as a monstrously overstrained sketch: now that it is happening positively and

actually before me, I cannot treat it otherwise than by the supposition that its hero must have escaped from a lunatic-asylum."

"Sane in all other respects," responded the young Frenchman, "I may indeed be goaded to madness by the passion with which you have inspired me. Now listen! That very attitude of goddess-like indignation which you just now assumed—that very aspect of ire which, with the mien of the Olympian Queen, you put on—have only exhibited your incomparable charms in a new phase, and rendered me more completely your slave. Aye!" he added, with a sort of fever of exultation, "I could consent to endure taunts—scorn—even the direst outpourings of your wrath, so long as you do but allow me to remain in your presence."

"And pray," demanded Mrs. Chesterfield, "who is the audacious individual who is persecuting me thus?"

"I am the Viscount de Chateauneuf," he responded: "and I may without vanity add that I belong to one of the oldest and wealthiest families of France."

"Most sincerely do I hope," immediately observed Mrs. Chesterfield, "that you have parents who will keep a watchful supervision over you?"

"My parents have long been dead," rejoined the Viscount: "they perished when I was a child."

"But you have guardians—you have relations," continued the lady, "who may take care of you?—for heaven knows that you require their attentive watching."

"I am my own master," he answered: "and no one has the power to exercise the slightest control over me."

"I should not have thus remained in discourse with you," observed Mrs. Chesterfield, "did I not really believe that your intellects were slightly unhinged. But if there be no ground for such compassionate feeling on my part, then for the same reason there exists no apology for your conduct; and I beseech——nay, I command that you leave me without further molestation."

"Oh! madam, reject me not thus!" exclaimed the Viscount. "Yes—I am mad—my intellects are unsettled—have your own way—anything—everything you wish or choose to suspect, so long as you permit me to be near you! I am not one of those vain and presumptuous libertines who fancy that they have merely to fling their looks upon a woman in order to captivate her: but the blaze of your beauty burst as it were upon me with a power that was irresistible. I feel towards you as never to any woman did I feel before——Would that this were a land of slavery, that I could be your slave!"

"Now, my Lord Viscount de Chateauneuf," said Mrs. Chesterfield, with a coolness which if not actually supercilious, was at least sufficient to damp the ardour and even provoke the irritation of the young nobleman if he really did not love her as passionately as he had proclaimed,—"you must confess that you are carrying the romance of the present proceeding to a point at which it becomes ludicrously unnatural and preposterous. I might—indeed, perhaps I *ought*—to exhibit more anger: but with that impression upon my mind, I really have not the heart to visit your silly presumption with any severer evidence of my displeasure—and hope that you will now at once pursue your own path."

"No, lady. By heaven!" he exclaimed, "if love could be chased out of the heart by bitter words, your's would have had that effect. It is not however so with me. I have suddenly entered into a new state of being: I feel as if I had a certain duty to perform,—a duty towards myself,—a duty for the assurance of my own happiness; and it shall be accomplished! I care not at what sacrifice nor at what risk: it is my destiny—and I will fulfil it. No: I will not leave you! By heaven, you shall not remain indifferent to me! My conduct shall be fraught with a perseverance that will compel you to take it as most serious, and not to stigmatize it as puerile silliness. You may invoke the aid of the law against me—you may consign me to a prison: but you cannot conquer the feelings of my heart. The term for my release must come: and then would I follow you all over the world—I would find you out, wherever your place of concealment—I would tear you away from the midst of your family—from the embrace of father and mother——aye, even from the arms of a husband——By heaven, lady! you shall be mine—and I swear it!"

Mrs. Chesterfield's countenance gradually grew profoundly serious; and then, mingling with that seriousness, was a certain degree of trouble, as the impassioned Frenchman went on speaking. She looked anxiously around as if to see if succour were nigh: but no one appeared—and they were in the depth of the wood.

"And is it a French nobleman—a French gentleman—a man of honour and of chivalrous mind who thus addresses me?" she asked, her frame trembling visibly. "Suppose, sir, that I do really possess a husband who is devoted to me, and who being absent, places the firmest reliance and the fullest trust in the honour and purity of his wife,—would you compromise me with him?"

"Have you not already gleaned sufficient from my words," exclaimed the Viscount, "to be convinced that you are speaking to a man whose excess of passion has goaded to frenzy? and what will not such a desperate man do? Compromise you with your husband! What does a woman require, but the love of a man—a love which is a worship and an adoration? That love shall you have from me. Rest assured that it will far transcend any amount of love with which your husband can regard you. And, Oh! if he be absent—if for a single day—a single hour—he could consent to separate himself from such a being as you, it is that he loves you not with one tithe of the fond ardour that my devotedness would display!"

"And do you seriously reflect, M. de Chateauneuf," asked Mrs. Chesterfield, her dark eyes resting earnestly upon his flushed and excited countenance, "that your words are fraught with a sovereign insult to a virtuous woman? Once more, sir, will you suffer me to depart? I wish for no scene—no exposure—nothing to compromise either of us in the more frequented parts of this resort; and therefore do I counsel you to take one path, and leave me free to choose another. For this reason also I do not abruptly break away from you; because I will not provoke you to hang upon

my footsteps, and pursue me in such a manner as will compel me to resent your conduct. You see, sir, that I speak considerately, and even kindly to you under the circumstances: I am willing to forget what has occurred, if you will only suffer me to pursue my way without farther molestation."

"I have already declared," he answered, "that we shall not part thus. I have sworn that I will compel you to regard me with some other feeling beyond indifference——'

"And therefore," interrupted the lady, "you would inspire me with terror."

"No," he rejoined: "with love!"

There was a pause, during which Mrs. Chesterfield again seemed bewildered and troubled,—a pause, too, during which her impassioned admirer drank in fresh draughts of fervid love. He was literally intoxicated by the feelings wherewith she had inspired him. All this reasoning on her part only maddened him the more fiercely—rendered him the more desperate. He was brought to that point at which he could commit a crime rather than not succeed in winning her whose grand beauty had so completely ensnared his soul. And now the reader will probably bethink himself of that description which we gave in a recent chapter of the varied modes in which young Cupid takes possession of the human heart: for, as in the case of Francis Paton and Angela Deveril, the mischievous god had entered the sacred tabernacle of tender feelings stealthily and gradually—so in the present instance, had he all in a moment stormed the heart of the Viscount de Chateauneuf.

"I feel so exhausted and overcome," said Mrs. Chesterfield, "by the excitement which for the last hour I have gone through, that in mercy I ask you to suffer me to return to my residence."

"Yes—if you permit me to know where that residence is. It cannot be far off," he added, as an idea struck him: "or you would not be on foot in this wood."

"But," she replied, "what guarantee have I against——"

"Molestation on my part!" he ejaculated, finishing the sentence for her. "Give me but a single hope, however faint—however distant: promise that of your own accord you will meet me again: name the hour and the place—and as a man of honour I swear that those with whom you are residing, shall have no cause to suspect that your beauty has won the heart of an admirer who will never be wearied of giving you proofs of his devotedness."

"You place before me, sir," answered the lady, "certain conditions which leave me no alternative. To-morrow at mid-day will I be in this spot: but I conjure you to reflect well in the meantime, whether you are acting wisely and well in respect to yourself—honourably and chivalrously in respect to me. And now, sir, if you follow at a convenient distance, you will see where I reside."

A look of profound gratitude, totally unmingled with overbearing triumph, appeared upon the countenance of the young nobleman: he felt that he had gained a material point—hope was burning in his breast—and with his glances did he thank that splendid woman for not having driven him to despair. She turned and walked in the direction of the Duranda' villa: she did not look back—but she knew that the Viscount de Chateauneuf was following at a certain distance. She reached the gate of the enclosure in the midst of which the villa stood; and as she rang the bell, she did glance round for a single moment. The Viscount was amongst the trees—and though visible to her, yet beyond the range of view commanded by the windows. He raised his hat in respectful salutation—tarried there till he saw that she really entered the house—and then plunging deeper into the wood, remained watching in concealment for at least an hour, to assure himself that she did not come forth again. For he thought it just possible that she might have merely called there upon some pretext, so as to rid herself of his importunities. But the hour passed: she did not make her appearance; and through an opening in the trees, he presently caught a glimpse of her as she passed one of the windows of the principal room on the first floor. Then he felt assured that she was really and truly an inmate of that house; and he hastened away with a heart full of exultation.

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

THE VISCOUNT DE CHATEAUNEUF.

PUNCTUALLY at noon on the following day, Augusta Chesterfield repaired to the appointed spot. The weather was again exceedingly beautiful and remarkably mild. The sun was shining—and there was a certain degree of warmth in the air which produced the impression of Spring's advent rather than of stern Winter's near approach. Mrs. Chesterfield was dressed with perhaps still more elegance than on the preceding day; and certainly her beauty was of a very superior character. The masses of her raven hair hung in long luxuriant tresses beneath the bewitching Parisian bonnet that she wore: her dress, of rustling glossy silk, fitted tight to her shape,—thus developing in well defined reliefs and in rounded outlines the rich contours of her form. As the pathway had grass on either side, and was exceedingly narrow—and the herbage might be damp—she raised her dress somewhat, as ladies are wont to do; thus affording a glimpse of the shapely foot and the well-turned ankle. There was a slight flush upon her countenance—the mantling of a carnation hue beneath the delicate olive of her pure skin; and her eyes appeared to swim in a lustrous languor.

The Viscount de Chateauneuf was at the *rendezvous*—which indeed he had reached half-an-hour before the appointed time; and on this occasion he had come on foot, so as to avoid the possibility of having his actions spied by the groom who had accompanied him on the preceding day. The moment he beheld the object of his adoration approach, he flew towards her, and before she had time to prevent the action—if she had the inclination—he had caught her delicately gloved hand and pressed it in rapture to his lips.

"You have come," he exclaimed, in a tone of fervid exultation! "You have come—you have kept your word—there is hope—and I am happy!"

"Yes—I have come, my lord," she answered, quickly withdrawing her hand, and speaking in a

very serious tone: "but it was with the expectation of finding that you had thought better of your yesterday's folly, and that in order to make amends you would not be here to-day."

"Then you understood me not! you comprehended not the passion with which your charms had inspired me! Oh, believe me when I declare that not for one single moment has your image been absent from my mind. Not once did I close my eyes in slumber last night: I lay thinking of you—I did not wish to sleep—my reverie was delicious. I knew that you would come to-day: I had no doubt of it! I felt that such a love as that which I cherished towards you, could not fail to inspire at least some small amount of compassion—some trifling degree of sympathy—some particle of interest. You must have reflected that a man who offers to devote himself entirely to you—to elevate you in his heart's tabernacle as the idol of his worship—is not one whose love is to be treated with indifference. All this I said to myself; and therefore I knew that you would come."

"And is it possible," asked Mrs. Chesterfield "that you are still in this frame of mind? What am I to do to reason you into a more rational course? Did I not tell you that I was married?"

"And did I not assure you in return, that no husband shall bar me from you? But he is absent—he neglects the treasure that he possesses——"

"Speak not of him thus," interrupted the lady: "he is on his way to India, whither imperious duties summon him."

"To India?" echoed the Viscount, enthusiastic joy lighting up his features, and rendering them so supremely handsome that the lady's countenance flushed with a deeper dye and her eyes swam in a more voluptuous lustre, as she gazed upon him. "To India, say you? Then has he left the arena open for another competitor to carry off the prize! To India?—and he could leave you behind him! Oh, he loves you not!——believe me, he loves you not—while I offer you the devotion of the tenderest heart and the adoration of a whole lifetime!"

The lady gave no answer—but bent down her looks as she walked slowly by the side of the impassioned young Viscount. He gazed upon her—that is to say, as much as he could discern of that gloriously handsome countenance which was thus bent downward: he gazed upon her with rapture and with hope! Then his eyes slowly wandered over the sweeping length of her magnificent shape; and he felt that he could seize her in his arms—he could strain her to his breast—he could cover her lips, her cheeks, and her brow with kisses. But he dared not yet go thus far: and yet he saw that his triumph was assured. For if she intended to reject him altogether, why did she continue silent now? why did she keep her looks bent down? why was she evidently reflecting? Ah! says not the old proverb that the woman who deliberates is lost?—and was she not deliberating at that moment?

"Tell me—tell me," he said, after a long pause, "that I am not altogether indifferent to you."

"I know not how to address you," she answered, in a low murmuring voice, as she gently raised her blushing countenance. "If I beseech you to leave me, you will not; and if I were to fly stealthily away from Paris, you would pursue me. If I invoke the aid of the law—which perhaps is my duty—I nevertheless feel that it would be a too cruel punishment for the love which you proclaim, and which seems to have become your master. In every way, therefore, do I find myself compromised with you. Four-and-twenty hours have elapsed since we parted; you have had leisure to reflect upon what yesterday took place—and yet you are still the same. The strength of your passion is thus shown—I cannot doubt it: and it were to take the highest stand on the pedestal of female pride—or shall I say to fall into the very extreme of female affectation?—if I were to declare that I am neither flattered nor complimented by the tribute of such a love as this."

The Viscount de Chateauneuf, literally trembling with the thrill of ecstacy and wild delight which shot through his frame, seised the lady's hand again—pressed it in his own—and this time found that it was not so immediately withdrawn. As he thus pressed it too, he fancied that it quivered somewhat to his touch: he likewise thought that the colour heightened upon her cheeks—and that therefore she herself was not inaccessible to the emotions that throbbed in his own heart. He offered her his arm; and she took it,—her hand however not leaning upon it, but merely resting there light as if it were a feather.

"I will not therefore say," she continued, in the same low murmuring voice as before, "that I am altogether indifferent to the proofs of love which you have offered me: but still I feel as if standing on the brink of a precipice into which one false step will precipitate me, and whence all return is impossible. Now, M. de Chateauneuf, it is no light thing for you to seek the accomplishment of this immense change in my circumstances: nor can I consent, as if it were in a moment of frenzy, to rush blindly and precipitately on such a new phase of existence. Let not our present interview be prolonged: it is for you to regard it as a proof that whatsoever I may promise will be faithfully fulfilled."

"Promise me, therefore," exclaimed the young nobleman, "that to-morrow, at the same hour and the same place, you will meet me. Promise me this—and I am your slave, ready to obey you in all things."

"I promise," answered Mrs. Chesterfield. "And now leave me——Go—let us separate: and above all things, take care how you compromise me at the respectable dwelling where I am residing."

"Compromise you!" ejaculated the Viscount, as if he thought the injunction seemed to throw a damp upon his hopes. "Assuredly I will not seek your presence until I receive your full permission: but if when you come to know me better—if when you catch more of the inspiration of that love which I feel for you,—if *then*, I say, you decide upon abandoning yourself altogether unto me, you will have to dare the opinion of the world—you will become what is called *compromised;* and from this you must not shrink. Do you understand me? It is no mere passing intrigue of gallantry which I propose: I should loathe myself if I were capable of offering you such an insult: I should loathe you if you were capable of accepting it. No:—what I require of you is the utter and total renunciation of all other ties; so that when your husband returns from India, he may not find you ready to receive him with open arms—but he may know the true-

sure he left behind him, has fallen into the possession of one who is better capable of appreciating it. I have wealth—immense wealth; and it shall be laid at your feet. Of my rank, under circumstances, I cannot make you the sharer: our union cannot be sanctified at the altar;—but the ties which are to bind us, shall be strengthened by the fondest love. And now you understand me; and you promise that to-morrow, at this hour and on this spot, we shall meet again?"

"I promise," was the reply, faintly and murmuringly given.

"And the name of her whom I adore?" said the young nobleman: "what name is it that I may breathe incessantly with the secret voice of my heart until we meet again?"

"Augusta Chesterfield," was the response. "And now that you have my promise, let us separate."

"Farewell, then, for the present, my own worshipped Augusta!"—and M. de Chateauneuf would have strained her to his breast; but she sped away from him in the direction of the Durands' villa.

On this occasion, however, she *did* look back for a moment; and she made a sign of adieu—so that the young nobleman was enabled to congratulate himself that the circumstances of their parting on the present occasion were far more favourable to his hopes than those of the preceding day.

In the afternoon Mrs. Chesterfield took an opportunity to walk with Madame Durand in the garden attached to the villa; and during a pause in the conversation, she observed, as if quite casually, "There are in this neighbourhood several very fine mansions: I presume that they are occupied by the *elite* of your nobility and gentry?"

Madame Durand particularised several; and being of a loquacious disposition, she entered into minute details relative to the reputed incomes and family circumstances of those persons concerning whom she was speaking.

"You behold that beautiful white chateau standing on yonder eminence about a mile distant?" she continued. "It belongs to the Viscount de Chateauneuf—a very wealthy young nobleman, and as handsome as he is rich."

"I think I have heard the name mentioned before," said Mrs. Chesterfield.

"Oh! it is a time-honoured name in the history of the French Aristocracy," proceeded Madame Durand. "True, our Aristocracy is nothing now-a-days: two revolutions and the Charter of 1830 have stricken down the *prestige* of nobility—and no great harm either. Therefore great names are only estimated now if associated with great wealth—which is the case with M. de Chateauneuf. But then," added the landlady, "the riches came by marriage, and were not already in his own family, which was very much impoverished——"

"Then this nobleman," observed Mrs. Chesterfield, stooping down to pick up her pocket-handkerchief,—"this young nobleman of whom you are speaking, is married?"

"Oh, yes!—he has been married for the last two years—and he obtained that beautiful chateau and the annexed estate, together with another chateau and another estate somewhere in the south of France, and an income of five hundred thousand francs* a year, *all* by this matrimonial alliance. I will tell you how it was," continued the garrulous Madame Durand. "There was a very opulent sugar-baker who retired from business some three or four years ago. He was a widower, and had an only child—a daughter named Stephanie. This young lady is exceedingly beautiful—one of the most perfect and angelic creatures you ever saw in your life—highly educated and brilliantly accomplished—of distinguished manners too—and elegant deportment. Now, I must tell you that the sugar-baker was a vulgar, coarse-mannered, repulsive person—very fond of the bottle—and when in his cups, most outrageously insulting to all his guests. The consequence was that, after retiring from business and mingling in the gay circles of fashion for a few months, he was completely shunned; and being turned out of good society, entailed the same penalty upon his hapless and innocent daughter. His ambition was to make for her a splendid match; and thus he suddenly found all his hopes, as he feared, completely frustrated. How was he to get back into society? how to accomplish his aim on Stephanie's behalf One of the few friends who remained to him suggested a means. 'You, my good fellow,' he said to the sugar-baker, 'can give your daughter a fortune: you need not therefore look out for a young nobleman or gentleman who has a fortune likewise; because with such advantages of his own, no such individual would under present circumstances espouse Mademoiselle Stephanie. What you require, therefore, is a young nobleman of brilliant connexions, ancient family, but no wealth; and who will consent to wed your daughter for her riches. Such a son-in-law would be able, by his position, to a certain extent to rule the opinion of society in your favour.'—The sugar-baker readily accepted this advice; the kind friend undertook to find such a nobleman as was wanted; and the impoverished scion of the Chateauneuf family was the fortunate individual thus selected. Accordingly, after a courtship of six weeks, Mademoiselle Stephanie became Viscountess de Chateauneuf. I must however observe that the young nobleman would not consent to any particular formality of marriage-settlements and so forth: he was resolved to have the whole control over whatsoever fortune his wife might bring him; and the sugar-baker was too eager to have the dream of his darling ambition fulfilled, to throw any obstacles in the way. Poor man! when once he was again introduced into society, and tolerated there as the father-in-law of the young and brilliant Viscount de Chateauneuf, he did not long survive the intoxication of his joy; and in a fit of another species of intoxication was suddenly cut off."

"And the young couple," said Mrs. Chesterfield inquiringly,—"are they much attached to each other?"

"Can it be supposed," asked Madame Durand, "that such an alliance should prove a very happy one? The Viscount is a sufficiently amiable young man: but it appears that he has conceived something bordering upon an aversion for his wife. Perhaps it is that his pride is wounded in being constantly reminded by circumstances that he owes all he possesses to the sugar-baker's daughter. Perhaps he feels that he sold himself, as it were, to the selfish ambition of a vulgar upstart: or

* £20,000 sterling, in English money.

perhaps there may be some infirmity of temper on his own part, with which the world is not generally acquainted. Certain it is, however, that with all his other good qualities—and I believe that he has several—he cannot bring himself to pay proper attention to the Viscountess."

"And does she pine at this treatment?" asked Mrs. Chesterfield: "does she resent it? or is she indifferent to it?"

"Indifferent—no!" ejaculated Madame Durand. "She loves and adores her husband: she worships the very ground on which he walks: she is too amiable to comprehend in all its intensity the fulness of his neglect—and much too sweet-tempered to think of resenting his conduct. She studies to make allowances for him: she cannot of course blind herself to the fact that he loves her less than she could wish—but she will not admit to herself that he loves her as little as he does. She attributes to faults or failings on her own side that conduct on his part which really has its origin in his invincible aversion for her. She fancies that she is not beautiful enough—that her manners are not sufficiently engaging—that her accomplishments are inadequate to her position; and she therefore strains and studies to render herself as agreeable as possible. This very effort on her part is distasteful to him: and her want of confidence in herself, appears to the Viscount an additional proof of her unfitness to be his wife. Now, Mrs. Chesterfield," added the loquacious but intelligent Madame Durand, "I think I have furnished you with a pretty tolerable insight into the family and circumstances of the Viscount and Viscountess de Chateauneuf."

"Have they any children?" inquired the English lady.

"None," was the response. "Perhaps if their union had produced issue, a tie which exists not now, might have bound the husband more closely to the wife."

"Then, I presume," observed Mrs. Chesterfield, with an air of careless indifference, as if she were merely talking for conversation's sake,—"that the Viscount seeks indemnification for domestic unhappiness, in the dissipations of your gay capital?"

"No," replied Madame Durand: "and this is one of the most remarkable phases in his character. So far from being dissipated, he is particularly steady: his chief amusement is riding on horseback—and he may frequently be seen cantering on a splendid steed, and followed by a groom in an elegant livery, through the adjacent wood. Whether he may have a mistress on the sly, I of course cannot say: but at all events he bears the reputation of being as well-conducted a young man in his private life as could possibly exist."

Here the discourse terminated, as a servant came forth to announce that dinner was served up.

On the following day, punctually at noon, Mrs. Chesterfield repaired to the place of appointment. She was now apparelled with a degree of elegance that made her charms truly resplendent. If she had studied her toilet in order to set off the grandeur of her beauty to the utmost advantage, she could not have succeeded more effectually. At the same time there was nothing *outré* or gaudy in her apparel—nothing inconsistent with the most exquisite taste. She seemed to know that she possessed a superb figure; and she had selected a garb the best calculated to display its fine contours. Under the circumstances in which she was keeping the present appointment, it is natural to suppose that there was a certain excitement of the thoughts which gave a heightened animation to the countenance; and when the carnation tinge did rest upon those soft cheeks—and when an additional flood of lustre was poured into those swimming eyes—it appeared impossible that the splendour or brilliancy of her charms could be enhanced.

The Viscount de Chateauneuf was earlier than the appointed hour at the spot; and, as on the preceding day, he had been waiting some little time, when the object of his passion made her appearance. He however had felt assured that she would not disappoint him—that she would keep her word—and that she would come. Handsome as she had appeared to him before, she was now, if possible, handsomer than ever in his eyes; and if she had studiously and deliberately intended to consolidate the empire which she had won over his heart, she certainly might congratulate herself on the fullest success.

"Adorable Augusta!" said the young nobleman, hastening towards her: but to his surprise and dismay, she suddenly assumed a cold and distant look, and held back the hand which he attempted in rapture to seize.

"My lord," she said, "you have deceived me. Frankly and candidly did I explain to you my position—that I was married——"

"Forgive me, Augusta—forgive me!" exclaimed the Viscount, becoming terribly agitated: "but I had not the courage to tell you yesterday that I also am married. On my soul, that avowal would have been conveyed in almost the very first words issuing from my lips on the present occasion!"

"You did wrong thus to deceive me," said Mrs. Chesterfield: "for deception it really was. You should have been candid at once, and not have suffered me to learn by the accident of conversation that such is the case. Do not think for a moment that I have been purposely prying into your affairs. No—heaven forbid! I thought you were all frankness and candour; and I received as gospel whatever fell from your lips."

"And not in one single word have I deceived you!" exclaimed the Viscount with impassioned vehemence. "It is true that I withheld a fact: but I have misrepresented nothing. I gave you the assurance of my fervid and devoted love; and heaven is my witness how truthfully I spoke in all that I thus said. If not, wherefore am I here now? And when I yesterday bade you reflect that there were sacrifices which you would have to make,—think you that I had not in view certain sacrifices on my own side? Think you that if you would have to surrender a husband, I had not already made up my mind to surrender a wife? Did I not expressly and emphatically declare that, although I could place my wealth at your feet, yet that I could not make you the sharer of my rank? And how can this discovery of my marriage constitute any difference between us, inasmuch as even if I were unmarried, you could not accompany me to the altar?"

"Perhaps," responded Augusta Chesterfield, "I

had a certain prospect in view while deliberating whether I should accept your proposals: perhaps I reasoned to myself that if I sacrificed everything for you, a divorce might be obtained between my husband and myself, and that then you would make me your wife. But now, under existing circumstances, the sacrifice you ask me to make is far greater than I regarded it while deeming you unmarried. Therefore," added Mrs. Chesterfield, in a firm voice, and bending upon the Viscount an equally decisive look, "I have met you here now to proclaim, emphatically and peremptorily, that everything is at an end between us. As a man of honour you will never breathe to a living soul that for a single moment I had the weakness to give ear to your words——"

"My God, Augusta, speak not thus!—my own adored Augusta!"—and the Viscount appeared the very image of despair. "Recall those dreadful words!—they are my doom—my death knell! Oh, that the same lips from whence you learnt the secret of my marriage, should have forborne to tell you that it was an unhappy one! Or perhaps that much was likewise explained to you? If not, I declare it now. I never loved her who bears the name of my wife: I never loved before until I beheld you. Oh! mine is a heart that craved an object whereon to bestow all the immensity of that love whereof it is capable; and my imagination had often depicted the *beau ideal* of her whom I could thus love passionately and adoringly. There was a void in this heart of mine to be filled up; and therefore was it that the very first moment my eyes settled upon you, I beheld the idol of my imagination—the *beau ideal* for which I yearned—the object which could alone occupy that place in my heart! Augusta, will you refuse such a love as this? No, you will not—you will not—it is impossible! I see that your looks are melting—their severity is dissipating—you will not drive me to despair!"

"What am I to do?—Oh, what am I to do?" said Mrs. Chesterfield murmuringly, with all the appearance of one who was cruelly bewildered how to act.

"What are you to do?" cried Chateaumeuf, seizing both her hands and pressing them in his own: "what are you to do? You are to breathe the word which will confirm my happiness, and thereby give me the means of ensuring your own!"

"Ensuring my own happiness?" said Augusta, in a musing strain. "Oh! it is a tremendous risk that I run in abandoning my husband for the sake of you! Yes—it is a risk which I dare not encounter——there is a reason——"

"And that reason?" ejaculated the Viscount de Chateaumeuf, full of the most anxious suspense.

"It is that by remaining faithful to my husband," answered Mrs. Chesterfield, averting her head, "I secure a name for the child which I bear in my bosom: but if I surrender myself into your arms——"

"I will be a father to your child!" responded the Viscount, in a low voice, but replete with a concentrated joy that he was enabled thus to remove the last scruple which appeared to exist in the mind of his adored one.

"Then I am your's," she answered: and she resisted not, when rapturously catching her in his arms, he strained her to his breast.

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

THE ANATOMICAL MUSEUM.

It was midnight—midnight in the dull and gloomy month of November; and neither moon nor star peeped forth from the leaden sky. A drizzling rain was falling,—so that the street-lamps looked as if seen through a mist; and no one was abroad, save those whom duty or necessity, or other urgent circumstances, compelled to remain exposed to the inclement atmosphere. The tall stiff policemen, wrapped in their great coats, wore their oil-skin capes: the daughters of crime stood shivering in doorways; and houseless mendicants endeavoured to draw their rags more closely around them.

The hour of twelve was being proclaimed by the countless tongues of Time throughout the metropolis, as Chiffin the Cannibal entered Conduit Street. His great shaggy coat was buttoned close: his slouching white hat was drawn as much over his countenance as possible; and a dingy red "comforter," entwining his throat, reached up to his very nose. His hands were in his capacious coat-pockets,—the right one clutching the end of his club, which reaching up to his armpit, was thus concealed by the sleeve of the arm itself. He walked quickly—did Mr. Chiffin the Cannibal: for, as the reader may suspect, he was bent on important business.

Turning up a narrow alley which lay between two houses and communicated with a mews, or large stabling-yard, Chiffin proceeded with the unhesitating air of one well acquainted—or, at all events, well instructed in the topography of the spot. Another diverging alley brought him to the back of the particular premises which he sought; and although there was a door in the boundary-wall, he paused not to force it open—but speedily scaled the wall itself. He was now in a garden of tolerably spacious dimensions, considering how thickly that quarter was studded with dwellings: indeed it was the only garden of that size in the entire neighbourhood.

"Old Bob Shakerly assured me there wasn't no dog," muttered Chiffin to himself, as he threaded the garden-walk: but still he kept his club in readiness to deal a ferocious blow, should any such defensive animal rush forward to attack him.

On gaining the rear of the habitation, Chiffin found—as he had been led to expect—that a few steps descended into a sort of area, in which stood the door opening into the kitchen-premises: while over this area, and in the angle which one of the garden-walls formed with the house, there was a narrow ascending flight of about a dozen stone steps leading to another door.

"Old Bob Shakerly said as how this would be the best," again muttered the Cannibal to himself: and he forthwith mounted those steps last alluded to.

It was almost completely dark in the garden,—no lamp being there to shed a ray upon the scene, and no moon nor star, as already stated, appearing

on the face of heaven. But the lynx-eyes of the Cannibal had no difficulty in embracing every feature of the premises; and thus did he proceed without delay or hesitation in the prosecution of his task. Besides, it was evident enough, from his own occasional mutterings, that he had been well tutored by old Bob Shakerly, who though having pocketted scores of Dr. Ferney's guineas, had not scrupled to sell his knowledge of the physician's premises for the bribe which his friend Chiffin had offered him.

The Cannibal's pockets contained all the requisite implements for house-breaking; and in this process he had a most wonderful experience. The door was therefore speedily forced open, and in so noiseless a manner that it could not have been heard by any one a dozen yards off. Chiffin was now inside Dr. Ferney's habitation. He listened —and all was silent. One of his pockets furnished a lantern of the description denominated a "darky" by persons of the Cannibal's fraternity; and this was soon lighted by means of a noiselessly-striking lucifer-match. The Cannibal found himself, as he had been led to expect, in a small passage communicating with a private staircase; and up this staircase he forthwith began to ascend. Every now and then he stopped and listened: but all was still silent. His club was under his arm—one hand carried the lantern—the other, thrust into a pocket, clutched a pistol: so, that should anything happen to menace his safety, this desperate character was fully prepared for such an event.

He gained the second storey: but here he suddenly found himself at fault. Old Shakerly had described to him the arrangements of the house just as he himself had been for years acquainted with them: he had told Chiffin which was the doctor's bed-chamber — where the museum and laboratory were situated—where the servants slept —and where the spare rooms might be searched for; and it was these spare rooms that Chiffin had purposed to visit,—naturally supposing that in one of them Lord Saxondale would be located. He carried in his head a complete map, so to speak, of Dr. Ferney's dwelling, according to old Shakerly's acquaintance therewith. Why then was he at fault? For the simple reason that the alterations which the physician had caused to be made when about to take lunatic-patients, had changed the aspect of the landing on the second floor; so that the Cannibal knew not in what direction to proceed. Where he expected to find doors, there was a partition-wall; and where he looked for a wall, there were doors. In short, the whole arrangements, as described to him by Shakerly, were reversed; and the light of his lantern showed him that these changes were entirely new—therefore unknown to his informant.

What was now to be done? He dared not remain loitering or deliberating there; and if he proceeded at random, he might enter a wrong room and alarm the whole house. But Chiffin was not the man to retreat when money was to be gained; and he resolved to continue his work at a venture. He tried the nearest door: it yielded to his touch—and the light of his lantern showed him a narrow passage. Comparing the position of this passage with the arrangements described to him by Shakerly, he fancied that it must lead to the spare apartments. He accordingly entered it—and tried another door at the extremity. This also proved to be open; and that it was so, must be attributed to an oversight on the part of Dr. Ferney himself—for this door communicated with a suite of apartments which the physician was almost invariably in the habit of keeping carefully closed.

Where was it, then, that the Cannibal thus found himself? In the museum of physiological curiosities, anatomical preparations, and waxen effigies. For a moment, as the light of the lantern revealed these horrors to the Cannibal's gaze, he was seized with the consternation of terror: but this effect was not likely to remain long upon the mind of such a hardened, desperate, care-nothing individual as he;—and the feeling was therefore quickly succeeded by one of curiosity. He stopped short, and looked around him. Here an Egyptian mummy, standing upright in its coffin-like box, met his view through the glass door: there a corpse, embalmed by Ferney's own hand, and wrapped in a shroud, glared upon the Cannibal with its dull glassy eyes. Wherever his looks settled, it was to alight upon some hideous object—some ghastly spectacle—or some monstrous curiosity. He passed on into the adjacent room, impelled by a feeling which he himself could scarcely understand. Here an array of embalmed heads upon a shelf first arrested his vision: then his gaze settled on a skull grinning on a table. He looked around: two waxen effigies, as large as life—representing human shapes afflicted with dire and loathsome diseases —appeared in their glass-fronted cases. Jars, also of transparent glass, containing infant monsters, were in another part of the room; and a colossal skeleton, with one of its fleshless arms extended, next arrested his attention. But, Ah! over what other object did this gigantic atomy appear to be keeping guard?—was that a living man standing in a coffin-like case, and seen through the glass door? or was it some fresh object of horror apparelled in the raiment of a gentleman? Chiffin, still impelled by that same irresistible feeling of curiosity, drew nearer; and holding up his lantern, threw its rays completely upon this object in its receptacle. Dismay and terror seized upon him: a subdued cry of consternation escaped his lips—for it was Ralph Farefield that seemed thus to be gazing forth at the Cannibal!

The club fell from Chiffin's hand; and it was a marvel that the other still retained the lantern: but the handle thereof did his fingers clutch with convulsive force, as if some intuitive spell prevented him from losing the light which showed him that pale countenance on which his dismayed and horrified looks were rivetted. Yes: there stood Ralph Farefield—to all appearance as if he had not been dead a day—the same as Lady Saxondale had seen him when, a few months back, she was introduced to the mysteries of this museum. There he stood—that same Ralph Farefield whom Chiffin had known upwards of nineteen years ago,—dressed, too, in the garb he was accustomed to wear, and with nothing to indicate that he was dead save the wax-like pallor of his countenance and the dull fixed stare of the glassy eyes! There he stood—the corpse of that man who had been one of Chiffin's earliest patrons in

the sphere of crime. No wonder that the recognition should have smitten even that desperate and hardened ruffian with horror and dismay—so unexpected was the spectacle—so ominous appeared to be its presence there! But not long lasted the impression thus made upon the mind of the Cannibal.

"It is but a dead'un," he muttered to himself: and picking up his club, he flung his rapid looks around to assure himself that nothing moved—no one was behind him; for there was still a sort of vague terror, though rapidly dissipating, hovering in his soul.

He now advanced close up to the case which stood by the colossal skeleton of the Russian giant; and he surveyed the corpse of Ralph Farefield with an earnest attention. He forgot, for the moment, the purport of his visit to this house—forgot that time was flying and that he had still much work to do. As he stood gazing on the corpse, it almost seemed as if it were becoming animated with a real life, and that it meant to address him. Its eyes seemed to glare as if vital existence were slowly lighting up within them: the lips appeared to move as if a deep hollow voice were about to come forth from the throat. But these effects were only caused by the oscillating play of the light upon the features; and Chiffin knew that it was so. Still, as he remained rivetted there by a sort of spell, he again felt as if there were something ominous in his thus encountering the dead of other times. It looked as if his former patron in iniquity stood there to warn him that his own career was drawing to an end, and that the time was short ere he would meet that *other* who had gone to the world beyond the grave upwards of nineteen years back!

It was with a sort of desperate effort that the Cannibal tore himself away: but as he reached the door, he could not help looking over his shoulder to assure himself that Ralph Farefield was not following him. On entering the next room—the first of the suite constituting the anatomical museum—Chiffin drew forth a flask from his pocket, and poured a copious draught of brandy down his throat. It appeared to do him good: or, in other words, it revived all the hardihood of the finished ruffian. Now he was once more equal to the task which he had in hand.

Issuing forth from the museum, and threading the passage, the Cannibal was again on the landing—again, too, bewildered which direction to take. But now it suddenly struck him that the altered arrangements of that part of the doctor's dwelling must have been effected for the reception of lunatic patients; and he naturally judged that the apartments assigned to them would look towards the rear of the premises, so that the iron bars at the windows should not afford an unsightly spectacle in the street-front. Guided by this conjecture, Chiffin proceeded to try one of the newly constructed doors. It opened: he peeped in—and at the same instant a man, who was lying in a bed there, started up. The light of the lantern streamed full upon his features; and Chiffin at once saw that it was not the countenance of Lord Saxondale. Quick as thought did the ruffian's club descend upon the head of the man thus startled from his sleep; and the stunning blow arrested the cry of alarm which was about to burst forth from his lips. He sank back insensible upon his pillow: but the experienced eye of Chiffin saw that he was not dead—merely stupified by the blow he had received. Not that the Cannibal would have cared overmuch if the consequences had been of a more fatal character.

The man thus disposed of, was in reality a keeper whom Dr. Ferney had hired in the course of that day, soon after his interview with Lady Saxondale,—this interview, as the reader will recollect, having resulted in the complete triumph of that wily woman over the physician, who had accordingly promised that Lord Saxondale should remain beneath his roof. Immediately upon having dealt the blow which thus effectually stunned the keeper, Chiffin the Cannibal looked into the adjoining room, the intervening door being open. There he beheld young Lord Saxondale, lying fast asleep in the couch.

A grim smile of satisfaction now appeared upon the features of the Cannibal: for he felt assured that his night's work would be crowned with triumph. Throwing back a look to ascertain that the keeper continued in a state of unconsciousness, Chiffin passed into the chamber where Edmund slept; and laying his hand upon the young nobleman's shoulder, he shook him gently. Edmund opened his eyes; and of a surety the countenance of the Cannibal, seen by the light of the lantern, was no very agreeable spectacle to greet the first regards of any individual so waking up. Awful dismay seized upon Lord Saxondale: he was stricken speechless with consternation;—and this was fortunate for the scheme then in progress, inasmuch as everything would have been spoilt if the cry which rose to his very lips had found vent.

"You have nothing to fear, my lord," said Chiffin in a whisper, albeit a hoarse one—and likewise in as reassuring a tone as he could possibly adopt. "I know I am not a very great beauty——"

"But who *are* you?" inquired Edmund, now recovering just a sufficiency of courage to break the seal which horror and dismay had in the first instance set upon his lips: for perhaps it will be as well to remind the reader that when the scene took place some months back at Madge Somers' cottage in the neighbourhood of the Seven Sisters' Road, Lord Saxondale did not behold the Cannibal at all; and therefore his features were now utterly unfamiliar to him.

"Who am I? Why, a friend of your'n," at once responded Chiffin.

"A friend?" echoed Saxondale, recoiling with visible horror; and he trembled likewise with apprehension.

"Well, at least I am employed by some genelmen which is interested in you," resumed the Cannibal: "so don't be frightened—but get up quick—put on your toggery—and let's be off."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Edmund, joy and hope suddenly springing up in his soul.

"You will see, my lord, it's so possible that a post chaise-and-four is waiting for you in the Square. Jump up, I say, and look sharp."

"But the keeper?"

"He's all right:"—and the Cannibal displayed his club significantly.

"You—you—have not mur—mur—murdered

him?" asked Edmund, with stammering speech: and his countenance was white as a sheet.

"Not I! Don't be afraid, my lord: only a gentle tap on his sconce, just to mend his manners a bit. But you get up; and I will go and stand by the feller, so as to give him another tap if he opens his eyes too soon."

Thus speaking, Chiffin returned into the other room; and Edmund, springing out of bed, proceeded to huddle on his garments. He naturally longed to ask his liberator a thousand questions,—who the gentlemen were to whom he alluded as his employers—whither he was to be taken—how Chiffin himself had got into the house, &c., &c.: but he felt there was no time to pause for such a purpose; and moreover the Cannibal, being at the extremity of the other room, was at too great a distance to be spoken to otherwise than with a certain degree of loudness; and this would be dangerous to the enterprise. On the other hand, Chiffin himself was stationed close by the keeper's couch—one hand grasping the club in readiness to deal another blow, if needful; and his left hand holding the lantern in such a way as to fling its beams on the man's features. But fortunately for the keeper, he remained in a perfect state of unconsciousness until Lord Saxondale had finished dressing: for it was by no means certain that a second blow, if dealt by the Cannibal, would have been so comparatively innocuous as the first.

In less than three minutes Edmund was dressed: never in all his life had he apparelled himself in so short a time; and yet his hands trembled—indeed his entire form quivered—with the most nervous anxiety and suspense.

"Now, my lord, follow me," said Chiffin; "and mind you tread just as if you was walking on eggs. I feel pretty certain this chap"—pointing to the keeper—"will remain quiet for a couple of minutes or so; and that's all the time we shall want."

They issued forth from the chamber: noiselessly they stole along—the private staircase was descended—and they reached the garden. Edmund, who in the meanwhile had continued in almost a frightful state of trembling nervousness, now felt as if he began to breathe the air of freedom; and when the Cannibal helped him to scale the wall and he alighted in the lane outside the barrier, he could scarcely prevent himself from sending forth an exultant cry to celebrate his escape.

"This way, my lord," said Chiffin, who had speedily clambered over the wall after Edmund: and he led him into Hanover Square.

There they perceived a post chaise-and-four waiting at a little distance—and two gentlemen, muffled in cloaks, standing near it.

"It's all right," said the Cannibal, approaching Mr. Lawson and Count de St. Gerard: "here's his lordship."

"To whom am I indebted for so much kind interest?" ejaculated Edmund, rushing forward to seize the hands of the French nobleman and his English friend.

"No matter, my lord—no matter," quickly responded Lawson: "another time, perhaps, you will know——indeed, your wife will give you sufficient explanations: for you must hasten and join her ladyship at Saxondale Castle."

"Ah! my wife?—she has done this? and she is in Lincolnshire?"

"Yes, my lord," replied Lawson, in the same hasty manner as before: "and you are enjoined to proceed with the utmost speed to meet her there. She has had a conversation with your mother, who is in London; and it is of vital consequence to your interests that you should see her ladyship——your wife I mean—without delay."

Thus speaking, Mr. Lawson pushed Saxondale into the post-chaise, which instantaneously drove rapidly off. It will be observed that the Count de St. Gerard took no part in this conversation: nor did he make himself known to the young nobleman. The reader will fully comprehend and appreciate his delicacy of feeling in this respect: but it was not because he thus remained silent and suffered his friend Lawson to be the spokesman, that he was an uninterested witness of the successful result of the Cannibal's enterprise at Dr. Ferney's House.

"Now, my man," said Lawson, turning towards Chiffin the moment the post-chaise had driven away, "you have acquitted yourself so admirably in the business entrusted to you, that you merit a liberal reward; and it shall be forthcoming. We said something about fifty guineas—and I believe you had a few in advance. But this purse contains a hundred: and now we have nothing more to do with each other. Good night to you, Mr. Brown."

"Good night, genelmen—and thank'ee kindly," responded the Cannibal, as he pocketted the heavy purse which sent forth the familiar chink of gold pieces.

He now made the best of his way, by the most secluded route, towards Hammersmith,—purposing to remain at the sign of the *Three Cadgers* until his arrangements for embarkation should be completed. He reached the neighbourhood where the boozing-ken was situated: it was now verging towards three in the morning, but was still quite dark in that November season. He was entering the narrow street at the extremity of which the *Three Cadgers* stood,—when, by the light of a lamp, he suddenly found himself face to face with Tony Wilkins.

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

THE TWO MURDERERS.

It was thus that Chiffin the Cannibal and Tony Wilkins met:—thus unexpectedly did they encounter each other. Both stopped short: an ejaculation, not loud, but subdued and gloomy, escaped the lips of each. Then there was a pause; and they stood eyeing each other by the light of that lamp which had mutually revealed their features. Both felt that some terrible crisis was at hand; and yet neither appeared exactly to comprehend what was to be done—nor how whatsoever was to take place, should be commenced. The idea of becoming friends was scarcely possible: the idea of parting without a mortal struggle as enemies, seemed equally impossible. Both the men appeared to comprehend this; and thus for nearly a minute did they stand gazing upon each other.

The reader is aware that Chiffin was of great

strength: Tony Wilkins was many years younger, but was also endowed with considerable muscular power. The Cannibal possessed a degree of brute courage which was equal to any emergency: Tony Wilkins, though less daring and venturous on ordinary occasions, had a spirit which if goaded to desperation, would flame up, investing him with a more than natural energy. Therefore if these two men engaged in a mortal struggle, it would be a terrible one.

As they looked at each other, they were both surprised on a certain account, and for the same reason. Chiffin was surprised to observe that Tony Wilkins was apparelled in the meanest manner, notwithstanding the immense sum he had robbed him of at the boozing-ken in Bethnal Green. On the other hand, Tony Wilkins was surprised that Chiffin, with a reward set upon his head, should go about in his wonted costume, which was rather of a conspicuous character.

"So we meet," said the Cannibal, in a hoarse voice, indicative of a concentrated rage: and his eyes literally glared upon Tony Wilkins.

"Well, it seems like it," answered the latter. "And what then?"

"Why, we are not likely to part again in a hurry, I think," responded Chiffin, "without a mischief being done to one or t'other of us."

"If you choose to begin, you'll find me ready," rejoined Wilkins, with a determined air. "But in course, if we make a row in the street, we shall both on us get took up; and then"—lifting his neck-tie in significant allusion to a halter—"we shall have *this* for the affair in Agar Town."

"I know it," answered the Cannibal: "but whatever happens, you and me must settle old scores. I tell you what: let us go to the *Cadgers*—and whatever's done, shall be done there."

"With all my heart," responded Wilkins. "You keep this side of the street—I'll go t'other——"

"Not a bit of it! We'll go arm-in-arm," interrupted Chiffin, with a diabolical expression—half leer, half grin: "we shall then be certain sure that one or t'other of us can't run away."

"Wery well," said Tony Wilkins; "let it be so."

They linked themselves arm-in-arm—this pair of ruffians who were mortal enemies—this couple of murderers who were bitter foes; and in that manner, without speaking another word, they proceeded along the narrow street till they reached the boozing-ken. All the inmates of the house were at rest: but inasmuch as the patrons and customers of the place were wont to call at all hours, the pot-boy slept just inside the front door, so as to be ready to answer any summons; and a bell was hung immediately over the spot where at night-time he was thus accustomed to make his bed.

The bell was pulled—the door was speedily opened—Chiffin and Tony Wilkins passed in; and the pot-boy closed the door again. It was pitch dark inside the boozing-ken: Chiffin stood on his guard with his pistol and his club—Tony Wilkins with a clasp-knife which he took from his pocket; and though neither could see the defensive precautions thus adopted by the other, yet they both mutually knew that such precautions were taken.

"Get us a light," said Chiffin: and the moment the lucifer, which the pot-boy struck, blazed up, the Cannibal on the one side lowered his club and dropped the pistol into his pocket—while Tony Wilkins on the other hand as quickly closed his clasp-knife and secured it about his person.

Then the two miscreants exchanged a fierce, malignant, cunning look,—so much as to imply that the one knew what the other had been doing, and that they were mutually on their guard against any sudden and treacherous attack. When the pot-boy had lighted a candle, Chiffin took it from him; and ordering some liquor, passed into the tap-room, followed by Wilkins. The pot-boy asked whether they did not mean to go to bed?—to which query the Cannibal replied that they intended to have a little conversation first. The pot-boy supplied them with the liquor ordered; and then crept back again into his own bed near the street-door—where he soon fell asleep. He was too much accustomed to the presence of the queerest and vilest characters in that boozing-ken, to have any curiosity to listen to the conversation which might take place between them.

Chiffin and Tony Wilkins seated themselves on opposite sides of the table on which the candle and liquor stood; and each helped himself with a sort of gloomy coolness to the brandy thus supplied. They drank without the slightest exchange of any of those compliments which under other circumstances would have passed;—and when they set down their glasses again, they eyed each other with a sort of sullen, dogged, menacing defiance.

They both felt that the moment was come when something must be said or done, in order to settle the past or establish the terms on which they were to be for the future.

"Now, don't you think that you was a very pretty feller," asked Chiffin, "to walk off with all the blunt I had been saving up to keep me in my old age?"

"Old age indeed?" ejaculated Tony Wilkins, with a sneering laugh: "you talk as if there wasn't no such a thing as a gibbet, and no such a chap as Jack Ketch."

"Well," responded the Cannibal, "he has got two halters—and when he has strung up one feller, he won't be too tired to do the work for another. But you hav'n't answered my question."

"I will answer it with another," replied Tony. "Don't you think you are an exceeding pretty feller—a reglar out-an'-out proper kind of a chap—to stick to all the swag got by doing the business at Sol Patch and his wife?"

"It's a lie!" interrupted Chiffin fiercely. "If you have seen a newspaper since, you must have read that after you and me parted I was chased by a lot of chaps, and had to jump into the canal to swim away and save my life. Didn't I meet you at the boozing-ken? and didn't you bolt away like a shot?"

"Well, I thought you was arter playing me a trick," replied Tony; "and so, as I had helped myself to your blunt, in course I stuck to it."

"And much good it seems to have done you," retorted the Cannibal.

"Well, it didn't do me no good—and that's the fact!" answered Wilkins. "I got blazing drunk—fell amongst a set of ragamuffins—and was robbed of every mag."

"That's a lie!" again ejaculated Chiffin. "You've got it about you; and I'll have it—or I'll cut your heart out."

"Two can play at cutting," said Tony: "but it's no lie, Chiffin, I can tell you. I shouldn't be togged as I am if it wasn't true; and I shouldn't have been such a fool either, to come wandering into London again to see what's to be done, arter having tramped about in the country for these weeks past—starving and sleeping under hedges or haystacks——"

"If I thought you was telling me the truth," observed Chiffin, looking very hard in Tony's face, "I think I should perhaps be inclined to forgive you. But I don't believe a syllable of it."

"I tell you what it is, Chiffin,—you may believe it or not, just as you like; and as for your forgiveness, I don't care a rap for it. You led me into that precious business in Agar Town; and I have never knowed what it was to be easy in my mind since. If I go to sleep, it's to dream of gibbets, and hangmen, and sheriffs, and chaplains, and white night-caps, and immense crowds gathered round; and all the while a deep bell seems to be tolling in my ears. That's always when I'm asleep; and when I'm awake and wandering about, I'm always afeard of being suddenly grabbed by anybody I meet. I can't look no one in the face without thinking that he surveys me just as if he was going to say, 'You are Tony Wilkins the murderer.' So you see, Chiffin, there's no thanks to you for leading me into that there business."

"Why, what a puling, sneaking, white-livered, chicken-hearted chap you are!" growled the Cannibal, with a look of contempt. "I couldn't have believed it!—a feller that was always ready for any kind of business——"

"Aye!—but there's a precious deal of difference," interrupted Tony Wilkins bitterly, "betwixt mere prigging and t'other kind of job. I was born and bred to prigging, as one may say:

so it come quite nat'ral, and there was no feeling *here* about it:"—and he laid his hand upon his breast as he thus spoke. "But t'other thing was done all in a minute: it was a sort of plunge from a puddle into the great deep sea. In course you can't understand all that I'm saying—'cause why, you're hardened to it. A chap that when he was a mere lad, could kill a feller and eat him, must be up to anything."

"Well, and so I am," responded Chiffin, with another grim smile, as if he took Tony's words as a most flattering compliment and gloried in it. "Why, there was a time when you was as proud as a peacock to be noticed by Mr. Chiffin Esquire; and you would have given one of your eyes to have earned the name of *Cannibal*."

"Yes—and a precious fool I was for letting you lead me away like that," answered Tony Wilkins, with a remorseful bitterness that was most unfeigned. "I only wish I had a chance of altering, and doing myself some good in the world. My thoughts and feelings has drove me to have this wish: but in course I know it can't be done. Besides, it would be useless. I should always see them folks with their throats cut and their brains beat out, rising before me. So you see, it matters little what becomes of me; and if you mean mischief—why, I'm your man, and we'll fight it out in any way you like. Only don't let us make more row than is necessary: let's start off and get into the open fields, if you like, and settle the business there: 'cause why, I don't want to get took up and sent to the Stone Jug."

"Well, Tony, you deserve anything I could do to you," answered Chiffin: "but I really don't see any use in our being bad friends."

"Can we be good 'uns?" asked Wilkins, eyeing the Cannibal suspiciously.

"Why not? Just now I said something about forgiving you: but you wouldn't have that word at no price—and so there's an end of it. Suppose we say we'll let bygones be bygones, have a new start, and work together for the future? Now, Tony," asked Chiffin, "what do you say to that?"

"I say that I'm in such a precious plight, I must do anything to get a crust. Now, do you think, Chiffin, that if I had had twopence or threepence in my pocket to pay for a bed, you would have found me wandering about the streets at this hour? I haven't eaten nothin' since the middle of the day yesterday; and so this drink is getting into my head."

"Well, Tony, shall we be friends?" said the Cannibal.

"With all my heart," was the quick response: "and here's my hand."

The two ruffians accordingly shook hands,—surveying each other with scrutinising earnestness at the same time, to assure themselves that no treachery lurked beneath this display of reconciliation. It would seem that they were mutually satisfied with the way in which they met each other's looks; and raising their glasses, each nodded in the accustomed style of familiarity.

"Now, my boy," said Chiffin, "you shall have some grub; and I myself am as hungry as a hunter—for I have been out on business all night, and had precious little sleep last night either. It's getting on for four," he added, glancing up at the immense clock in the tap-room; "and I sha'n't go to bed yet awhile. I must eat first. I know where the food is kept; and if you'll lend me the light, I'll go and help ourselves."

Thus speaking, Chiffin took the candle—and left the room. In a few minutes he returned, laden with a dish containing cold meat, a loaf of bread, and half a Dutch cheese. These comestibles he spread upon the table, and bade Tony Wilkins commence an attack thereon. This the younger ruffian was by no means backward in doing; and for the next half-hour there was very little said, both being too busy in satisfying their appetite to indulge in discourse.

"Well now," said Tony Wilkins, when his ravenous hunger was appeased, "what's to be done?—for if you and me is to work together, the sooner we do summut, the better—'cause why, as I said just now, I'm altogether aground."

"You have been unfortunate, then?" observed the Cannibal.

"I can't exactly say how I have managed to live at all," rejoined Wilkins. "It wasn't living—it was downright starving. I never had such a time of it! I raly used to think it was a judgment for that there business——"

"Don't talk no more of it," interrupted the Cannibal: "it makes you quite chicken-hearted. Look here, Tony," he continued, pulling a sovereign out of his pocket and shoving it across the table: "when I say I'm friends with a chap, I mean it; and you sha'n't want a little blunt as long as I've got it to give you."

"Well, you're a good feller arter all," exclaimed Tony, as he took up the money. "I begin to feel summut like myself again."

"Aye—and you *shall* be like yourself again too, very soon," said Chiffin: "for I've got a good thing in hand for to-night; and we'll talk it over presently. Then I'll let you know what my plans are; and we sha'n't be in London many hours."

"I like you again, Chiffin, as much as ever," said Wilkins, on whom the brandy had taken more or less effect.

"Well, I'm getting rather sleepy," said the Cannibal: "and yet I don't know that it's worth while going to bed. Half-past four," he added, with another glance at the clock. "Suppose we lie down on these benches and take a nap for an hour or two: then we shall wake up refreshed—we'll have some precious strong coffee, and talk over different matters."

"With all my heart," answered Wilkins: and he proceeded to lay himself down on one of the seats.

The Cannibal did the same, and in a few minutes appeared to doze off. Then he sent forth a low snoring noise: but the man slept not in reality; and every now and then he slightly opened one of his eyes and looked in the direction where Tony Wilkins lay. He could not however discern whether the latter was asleep, or whether *he* also was pretending to be so, but was keeping on the watch for fear that the reconciliation might not be genuine. The Cannibal accordingly retained his recumbent posture: but not one wink of actual slumber did he take;—and thus the time passed on until the people of the house began to move about soon after seven o'clock. The pot-boy entered to sweep out the tap-room; and the Cannibal

raised himself slowly up with an air of extreme drowsiness. Tony Wilkins, who had really been sleeping, was awakened by the entrance of the pot-boy; and Chiffin was keen enough to perceive that he had actually slumbered.

"He thinks it's all right," said the Cannibal to himself: then speaking aloud, he exclaimed, "Well, Tony, do you feel better for that snooze? Mine has done me a world of good; and I'm as fresh as a lark. Let's go and have a bit of a wash in the yard; and meanwhile they shall get us some breakfast."

Tony Wilkins followed the Cannibal into the little yard at the back of the boosing-ken, and where there was a well, the mouth of which was unprotected by the usual wooden lid, which had recently been broken; and the landlord had neglected to have it repaired.

"Wait till I get a basin and a bit of soap," said the Cannibal, retracing his way into the house for the purpose.

In a few moments he re-appeared, with the objects which he had been to fetch; and he placed them in a window-ledge, telling Wilkins that he might have the first use of them. The unsuspecting Tony was advancing towards the window-ledge, —when, just as he neared the mouth of the well, Chiffin sprang upon him with the force and fury of a tiger, at the same time giving vent to a subdued growl of diabolical savageness. Wilkins—instantaneously nerved with a preterhuman strength, which was inspired by the horrific danger to which he was thus all in a moment exposed—saved himself from being plunged headlong into the well, and made the Cannibal reel a few paces back. But Chiffin relaxed not his hold: *he* also felt himself armed with the power of a thousand: the struggle lasted but for a few brief moments—and the infuriate monster, hurling his miserable victim backward with a terrific impulse, sent him toppling over the brink of the yawning hole.

Whether it were that Tony's head struck against the windlass and thus instantaneously stunned him —or whether it were that he was stupified with awful horror—we know not: certain however it is that no cry escaped his lips. Down he fell—there was a heavy splash—and as Chiffin with gloating looks bent over the opening, he saw that all was still.

CHAPTER CXL.

RAMON DE COLLANTES.

We must now go back for three weeks, in order to relate the first incidents of an episode which will however eventually be found to fit into this portion of our narrative,—inasmuch as its closing circumstances will bring us down to the date already reached: namely, the first week in November. It was therefore in the middle of October, that about a dozen well-armed men, and about half that number of very beautiful women, were grouped upon the bank of one of the streams flowing through the wild valleys of Catalonia. The males wore the half-military, half-mountaineer dress which was peculiar to that district and to their own special avocations: the females were clad in the elegant costume also characteristic of those regions, and which has been before alluded to in the history of Elizabeth Paton.

Spanish feminine beauty for the most part exists more in novels and romances than in reality: at the same time beauty is to be found in Spain as well as elsewhere;—but in no part of that immense country, may female charms be so frequently encountered as in the principality of Catalonia. The women belonging to the band of which we have above spoken, were assuredly the choicest specimens of this feminine loveliness. The picturesque apparel set off to admirable advantage the luxuriant contours of their forms: the fresh air and their own lightness of heart gave the carnation glow of animation to their countenances: their eyes sparkled brightly—and the smiles of their rosy lips displayed, in each individual instance, teeth of the most perfect ivory-whiteness. The men were as fine a set of fellows as ever wore broad-swords at their sides or shouldered muskets: their sun-burnt complexions displayed the rich hues of vigorous health: their long dark hair clustered in natural curls about their heads: their glossy moustaches and beards added to the martial manliness of their looks.

It was in the forenoon of a bright and superb day, in the middle of October, as already stated —when these individuals, male and female, were thus grouped on the bank of the stream. Three or four tents were pitched close by; and in the shade of an overhanging crag, a cauldron was seething, in true gipsy-fashion, above a fire fed with logs of resinous firs. An elderly woman—serving as cook to the band—was watching the culinary process: while the men, stretched in lounging positions, smoked their pipes and chatted with their mistresses, two or three of whom were diligently plying the needle. It was altogether a picturesque spectacle,—that group of Catalans amidst the wildly beautiful scenery of their own native hills!

If their conversation were listened to, it would have been found to run as follows:—

"I would give much to know what occupies your thoughts, Ramon," said one of the young females, gaily and merrily addressing herself to the chief of the band,—who, amongst those fine men, was decidedly the finest—the handsomest in features and the tallest in stature: while his age did not exceed six-and-twenty.

"You shall know my thoughts, pretty one," responded Ramon. "I was envying Gonzales the possession of such a sweet mistress as yourself—and wondering how soon accident or fortune would furnish me with another to supply the place of her who fled three months back."

"Surely the redoubtable Ramon de Collantes cannot long be at a loss for a lovely one as his partner?" answered the same female who had before spoken. "He has but to make an incursion into some hamlet and carry off her who pleases his fancy best."

"Yes—this might be done," rejoined Ramon: "and *has* been done before," he added, with a smile. "But what has been the result? We have made enemies of those villagers whom it is our interest to keep as friends. No—it is not by such means that I must look to find a suitable partner of my fortunes."

"Then what project have you in your head?"

inquired Gonzales, now joining in the discourse which his mistress had commenced: "for it is evident that you are revolving something in your thoughts."

"Right!" exclaimed Ramon de Collantes. "I have determined that the first lovely damsel whom we may intercept travelling by coach or chaise, shall become mine—no matter how high her degree, nor what amount may be offered for her deliverance. Now, friends, will you make this concession to your chief?—will you pledge yourselves to forego the prospect of sharing a large sum for the ransom of such female, so that my desire may be fulfilled?"

"Agreed!" was the general cry on the part of all the male members of the band: while the females expressed their approbation with their arch looks and their smiling lips.

Scarcely was this singular convention thus settled, when Ramon de Collantes, suddenly starting up, pointed to an eminence on the summit of which stood a knot of trees, and whence a survey might be taken of all the circumjacent district for several miles. From a bough of one of those trees a small flag was seen to wave; and as the chief of the band pointed towards it, his comrades at once appeared to understand its meaning. Snatching up their weapons, which lay scattered on the ground, they were in readiness to obey whatsoever orders might be given: but all eyes were kept fixed on the knot of trees on the summit of the eminence. The little flag disappeared; and from the midst of the trees an individual came forth,—hastening down the somewhat precipitate slope, so as to join his comrades. He was apparelled and armed in the same style as themselves—and had evidently been on the look-out from the spot where he had hitherto remained concealed.

"What tidings?" demanded Ramon, when the watcher was near enough to be thus questioned.

"A post-chaise approaching along the road!" was the quick response.

"From which direction comes it?"

"From the north," was the answer. "It is doubtless bound to Barcelona."

"Then march, comrades!" exclaimed Ramon: and placing himself at their head, he led them quickly away from the spot.

Those to whom the females belonged, waved their hands in token of temporary farewell; and the fair ones themselves wished them success in their present enterprise. In a few minutes the band was beyond the view of the females; and turning into a narrow gorge, from which one side of the eminence rose abruptly, they pursued their way for about ten minutes, until they reached a grove at the farther extremity of the chasm, and which concealed as well as separated it from the main road. The grove was quickly threaded; and at the very instant that the banditti—for such they were—reached the road, the post-chaise, drawn by mules, was lumbering slowly past. The drivers offered not any resistance; and as the sole occupant of the vehicle was a female, there was no need to use violence—much less was there any reason for a conflict. Ramon de Collantes,—who had been chosen chief of the band as much on account of his proficiency in various languages, as for his valour and martial experience,—at once addressed the affrighted lady in the French tongue: for he saw that she was not a Spanish woman;—and he bade her have no fears for her life. Then he threw a rapidly significant glance around upon his comrades, as much as to imply that accident had just sent him the object of those very wishes which he had so recently been expressing. The lady,—who was indeed remarkably handsome, though evidently somewhat careworn, and now paler still with terror,—did not reply in the French tongue: but in a few broken sentences uttered in English, she besought the bandit-captain to let her proceed on her journey, as her object was of life and death importance.

"Ah! madam, you are English, I perceive," said Ramon de Collantes, now speaking in the traveller's own native tongue: "and if Dame Fortune had intended to confer upon me some special evidence of her favour, she could not have chosen a better mode: for I love and adore you beautiful English ladies!"

The fair traveller appeared much alarmed at the libertine flippancy of the chieftain's words,—accompanied, as they were, by looks of gloating desire wandering over her face and form, as she sat in the chaise. She evidently apprehended the very worst at his hands: but being a woman of naturally strong mind, she subdued her terrors as well as she was able, and addressed him in these terms:—

"I have gold in my purse—and you perceive that I have some little jewellery about my person. Take all these! My trunk contains but some necessary changes of apparel: take them also if you will—but I beseech you to suffer me to proceed on my route! Oh, senor!" she added, a flood of tears suddenly gushing forth from her fine eyes; "you know not how important it is to me to reach Barcelona with the least possible delay!"

"No doubt of it, madam," answered Ramon: "every traveller, whether male or female, tells us precisely the same story. In the present instance it is not your gold nor your jewellery which we will lay hands upon: as for your trunk, one of my men shall take charge of it for you;—but it is absolutely necessary that you should alight and accompany us elsewhere."

Again did an expression of acute alarm appear upon the lady's countenance; and joining her hands in an earnest manner, she said in a voice of corresponding entreaty, "Once more do I beseech you that I may be suffered to proceed! There is a person, dearer to me than life, in sore trouble—on whose behalf I have undertaken this long, long journey——"

"Madam," interrupted Ramon de Collantes, "it is somewhat inconvenient for us to stand bandying words upon the public highway: I therefore request that you lose no time in accompanying us whither we shall lead."

"Good heavens, what a frightful calamity!" she exclaimed, all the remnants of her fortitude appearing to abandon her, and her countenance becoming expressive of a mingling anguish and despair.

"I am grieved, madam, to distress you," rejoined Raymond: "but it cannot be otherwise. You must come!"

"No—you may kill me first!" ejaculated the fair traveller: "you must drag me hence by force——"

"Which I shall assuredly do," responded the bandit-chief, in a decisive tone. "Come, madam! You would do well to alight of your own free will: it is simply absurd for you to offer resistance against a dozen strong men."

"One word more!" cried the afflicted stranger, now sinking upon her knees inside the vehicle, at the open door of which Ramon stood thus parleying with her. "Have you any being on earth who is dear to you? If so, by the name of such loved being, I adjure you to have mercy upon *me!* Again I declare that there is one whom I love more dearly than life, now the inmate of a gaol—perhaps doomed to die—and if I hasten not to console him——"

"Madam, it goes to my heart," interrupted Ramon, "to be compelled to reject your prayer: but it cannot be avoided. I am resolute—I am determined—you must come with us."

"Then may God help me!" said the unhappy stranger, covering her face with her hands and bursting into another torrent of tears.

One of the men, on a signal from Ramon de Collantes, shouldered the trunk,—while he himself, throwing his arms round the fair traveller's waist, was about to drag her forth from the chaise,—when suddenly regaining her presence of mind, she said with mingled dignity and indignation, "Touch me not, senor! If I must accompany you, I will at least escape as much outrage as by my own conduct I may be enabled to avoid."

With these words she descended from the vehicle: but the moment her feet touched the road, she again bent a look full of the most earnest supplication upon the bandit-chief,—saying, "I had heard much of the chivalrous magnanimity of Spaniards—Oh! let not my faith therein be destroyed now!"

Even in the depth of her affliction, she appeared so exceedingly handsome—with her dark blue eyes, her vermilion lips, her beautiful teeth, and the luxuriant ringlets of dark brown which clustered on either side of her countenance—that Ramon de Collantes was ravished with her charms. Then too her form was so fine,—her stature so tall, her shape so richly and yet so symmetrically modelled,—that the bandit-chief thought he could not obtain for himself a more fitting mistress; and though not entirely without generous sentiments, he could not possibly bring himself to renounce the splendid creature whom accident had thus thrown in his way.

"Madam," he said, again assuming a resolute look, "you must accompany us!"

For an instant the afflicted fair one glanced rapidly around, as if in the last wild hope of observing some succour near: but that was scarcely to be expected in the mountainous regions of Catalonia. She would have appealed to the muleteers for aid—only that she now beheld them in friendly discourse with three or four of the banditti, and accepting drams from the flasks of these lawless individuals. All hope died within her: and in order to avoid outrage, she motioned that she was ready to accompany the inexorable chief.

He led the way through the grove, back into the gorge,—his men following at a little distance, and one of them bearing the trunk. As the party walked along, the fair traveller again used all her eloquence to move Collantes to mercy: but he still proved resolute in his purpose. Now that he had still more leisure than even at first to contemplate her, he saw that she must be about four or five-and-twenty; and though not perhaps a lady in the strict meaning of the term, yet of genteel appearance, good manners, and graceful bearing. She was well-dressed; and altogether of an appearance full well calculated to make an impression upon the heart of Ramon de Collantes. Her voice was of flute-like harmony—rich-toned without being masculine; and when modulated to the accents of passionate entreaty, it had something that ravished rather than moved the soul of the bandit.

"No, fair lady," he said; "it is impossible I can accede to your prayer. With me and my band must you remain: but you may be assured of worthy treatment. May I ask whether it be a lover, a husband, or a brother, whom you were on your way to see at Barcelona?"

This allusion to the object of the fair traveller's journey, threw her into a fresh paroxysm of grief,—so that she threw herself down on the slope of the gorge; and again covering her face with her hands, gave way to an outburst of woe so deep, so anguished, that it well nigh moved the heart of Ramon to compassion. But as his eyes slowly wandered over the fine symmetry of her form, he again felt how impossible it was to surrender the prize thus thrown in his way;—and moreover, if he himself were induced to do so, he knew that he should only incur the ridicule of his comrades. Having some tolerable amount of experience in respect to the female heart, he thought it better to permit that gush of affliction to expend itself ere he addressed her again;—and thus, for some minutes, there was a halt at that spot. None of his companions could speak a syllable of English: they therefore understood not what had been passing between himself and her;—but they of course judged that she entreated him to grant her freedom—and that he refused. By their looks they encouraged him to persevere: while they likewise congratulated him, in a similarly significant manner, on the prize which he had obtained.

"For what am I destined? what is to be my doom?" she suddenly demanded, as she sprang up to her feet, her cheeks burning with indignation which her last thoughts had evidently inspired. "If you think to bend me to your vile purpose, you will be disappointed! I will die sooner! Yes—there is one whom I love, and who is in a dungeon——Perhaps his life will be forfeited to the laws of your country——and ye are not men—ye are monsters in human shape, if ye hold me back from the accomplishment of my sacred object! Oh! once again do I conjure you, senor—suffer me to depart! Take all I possess—tell me what farther ransom you require, and it shall be paid——honourably and duly paid—I swear that it shall!—even though my parents beggar themselves to raise the sum which you may demand!"

Whether in the moments of her indignation, or in those of her pathetic entreaty, she appeared so handsome in the eyes of Ramon de Collantes, that he was more than ever determined to keep possession of her. She read this decision in his looks; and suddenly becoming quite calm,—yet it was the calmness of desperation,—she said in a low deep voice, "Tell me, senor, for what am I destined?"

"To be my bride," responded the bandit-chief.

"Your bride?" she ejaculated. "And where is the priest who will join our hands?"—these last words being spoken with a sort of bitter irony which arose from desperation itself.

"By the Holy Virgin, lady," exclaimed Collantes, "it is a comical question that you put! Soothly speaking, however, I must confess that there is no chaplain attached to my band; and therefore we must be content with the marriage festival, without the religious rites. But in me will you have a brave, a fond, and an indulgent partner. We live a happy life: the whole range of the wild Catalan mountains and their picturesque valleys is our own: we pay neither tax nor tribute: the purses of travellers furnish our revenues. Sometimes we dwell in tents in truly patriarchal style: at others we seek our baronial tower. We dance—we sing—we eat and drink of the best: we have no cares. Such is the life which you have now to embrace;—and in truth it is not a destiny which need wring tears from those bright eyes of your's."

"I have listened with attention," responded the fair traveller,—pale with that same desperate calmness which she still maintained,—"because I would know every detail and minute particular of the doom which you purpose to be mine. But it shall not be! You see before you a woman who, if she have hitherto displayed in your presence the weakness of her sex, will afford you proof of its strength. Heartless robber, I will not be your bride!—soulless and implacable brigand, you shall not triumph over me! It shall be a struggle until the very death between you and me, if you dare attempt coercion or outrage! Around us there are precipices, a leap from any one of which is certain death: or in these wilds there are waters, flowing rapid and deep—and they shall engulf me sooner than I will abandon myself to your arms! Now, as you have given me your decision, I offer you mine; and if you seek to make me the victim of your persecution, it will not be a triumph which you accomplish—but a murder which you perpetrate!"

"Beautiful lady," exclaimed the bandit-chief, scorn wreathing his moustached lip, "in every respect are you fitted to become my bride. It is a woman of spirit, such as you, that I have sought; and again I repeat that Dame Fortune has favoured me this day. Have the kindness to accompany us yet a little farther; and you will find charming females to welcome you amongst them."

The fair stranger said not another word—but moved forward, the bandit-captain walking by her side. No doubt she was resolute in her purpose of seeking death, should the moment come when she must either adopt that alternative or else retain life at the price of her honour:—and perhaps she was not yet without the hope of either bending the hitherto inflexible brigand to compassion, or else of discovering amidst the chapter of accidents some opportunity of escape. As he watched her countenance, he saw that he indeed had to do with a female of strong mind.

In a few moments the encampment was reached; and the Catalan women, gathering around the new-comer, endeavoured to make her comprehend by signs—when they found she understood not their language—how welcome she was. Then too, their dark eyes flung congratulatory looks upon Ramon de Collantes, who had thus succeeded in obtaining the gratification of those wishes he had this very forenoon been expressing. As for the fair stranger herself, she received the women's attentions with a sort of distant courtesy,—as if she did not choose to offend them outright, nor yet to show the least evidence of being reconciled to her fate. In this latter respect it was useless to dissimulate,—inasmuch as by no sudden change in her manner towards Ramon de Collantes, could she possibly hope to deceive him in so short a time with regard to her feelings, or throw him off his guard.

The contents of the cauldron were emptied into vessels ready for their reception: other articles of food, accompanied by bottles and jars of wines and strong liquors, were produced; and the banquet was spread upon the grass. Meanwhile the captive stranger had sat down on the trunk of a felled tree; and as she contemplated the tents, the females, the arrangements for the repast, and the aspect of the brigands themselves, she began to associate all these appearances with some circumstances which the present adventure itself had brought back to her memory.

"Are there many such bands as your's in the mountains of Catalonia?" she asked, addressing herself to Ramon de Collantes.

"There are several such bands," he responded, evidently well pleased that she should thus of her own accord have renewed the conversation.

The lady remained absorbed in thought for a few moments—and then said, "I presume, by the air of authority which you wear, that you are the acknowledged chief?"

"I think, lady," he responded, "that I have already given you to understand such to be the case."

"How long have you been with this band? how long have you acted as its chief?"

"I have been with the band for some eight years," was the rejoinder. "You may therefore judge, lady, that I was only a stripling when I joined it. As for the captaincy, I have held the post about five years."

"And are the captains of the various bands generally known to each other?" was the fair traveller's next question.

"For the most part," replied Ramon, surprised at these queries: for he more than suspected that they were not put through mere idle curiosity, but that the stranger had some ulterior object in view.

"It must occasionally happen," she continued, "that there are names amongst you which acquire the potency of spells from being associated with daring deeds and generous actions. What if I were enabled to mention some such name as this?—what if I were to tell you that I have a slight acquaintance with one who a few years back commanded a band in these mountains—it might even have been your own—and that were he here now, I feel convinced he would use his influence on my behalf? If such a name pass my lips, I say, would it induce you to have compassion upon me?"

While the fair stranger was thus speaking, Ramon de Collantes contemplated her with an increasing degree of blended interest and curiosity.

It naturally surprised him that an English female whom accident had thus placed in his power, should allude to an acquaintance with any former bandit-chief such as he himself now was: and he knew not at the instant how to reply. While he was still hesitating, one of his comrades suddenly gave vent to an ejaculation; and starting to his feet, grasped his musket. All eyes were at that instant turned in the same direction towards which the brigand was looking: and they beheld a person, evidently dressed as a gentleman, approaching from near the entrance of the gorge. Perceiving that he was unattended, and that no followers made their appearance, the fire-arms which in the first moment had been caught up, were deposited on the ground again,—all save that of Ramon himself, who retained his musket as he advanced a few paces to meet this new-comer, at the same time significantly nodding to his men to keep a sharp look-out upon the fair captive and anticipate any attempt which she might make with respect to an escape.

But strange indeed was the expression which rapidly lighted up her handsome countenance with blending joy and amazement, as that new-comer drew near. Anxious uncertainty speedily changed into positive conviction: for she saw that she was not wrong—that the individual who was advancing, was indeed he whom she had conjectured at the first glimpse of his form and features;—and springing from her seat, she cried in a tone of thrilling exultation, "Count Christoval!"

"Christoval!" echoed every voice, as every one likewise started up again: and there was a general rush towards Don Diego—for he himself this new-comer proved to be.

But the instant his eyes settled upon the countenance of the fair captive, he stopped short with as much amazement as was depicted on her own features; and he exclaimed, "Good heavens, Miss Marshall! is it you?"

CHAPTER CXLI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

Yes—it was indeed Don Diego de Christoval who thus made his appearance. This too was the very band he had once commanded;—though necessarily, during the interval of about five years since he resigned his post, there had been changes as to a few individuals, wrought by violent death on the one hand and by fresh membership on the other. But six or seven males and two or three of the females were still the same whom Don Diego had known and who knew him. To all the rest was his name familiar as a loved and an honoured one; and thus was it that the moment it was mentioned, there was a general rush, prompted by enthusiastic feelings, towards him.

It was now the turn of Ramon de Collantes and all the members of the band, male and female, to be astonished at the recognition which took place between Don Diego Christoval and the captive lady, as the latter flew towards the former for protection. The Spanish nobleman shook her kindly by the hand: he could not forget that it was through her, on his arrival in England ten weeks back, he had obtained a clue to the discovery of Elizabeth Paton's residence; and moreover he instantaneously knew by the manner in which she bounded towards him, that she was the captive Englishwoman whom he had expected to find with the band. He was aware that his influence would suffice to effect her liberation; and he was well pleased at having the opportunity of rendering her a service.

We will pause for a moment to explain how it happened that the Count thus made his appearance upon the scene. As the reader is aware, he had left England soon after he was formally accepted as Elizabeth Paton's suitor—to settle some affairs in the Spanish capital, and procure such documents as would convince the Marquis of Eagledean he was the wealthy individual he represented himself to be. Being desirous to get back again with the least possible delay to England, so as to enjoy the society of his well-beloved Elizabeth,—he brought his business at Madrid to a speedy termination, and set off in his travelling-carriage on his return. Scarcely had the banditti quitted the spot from which they bore off Kate Marshall, when the equipage of Count Christoval dashed up. From the muleteers he learnt an account of what had taken place; and though they were unable to tell him the name of the Englishwoman whose abduction had thus been forcibly effected, they nevertheless made him aware that she was in a state of the most cruel tribulation. The muleteers were well acquainted with the band led by Ramon de Collantes; and from the information they gave, Don Diego thus discovered that it was the very same which he himself had once commanded. Anxious to perform an act of generosity, he ordered his equipage to await his return; and judging from his topographical knowledge, that the band would be encamped at the extremity of the gorge, he proceeded in that direction,—making his appearance under the circumstances already described.

When the first greetings had taken place between himself and the lawless tribe, he made a rapid sign for Kate Marshall to retire to a little distance, while he spoke aside to the bandit captain. Ramon de Collantes revered his late chief with truly enthusiastic devotion; and it therefore required but little suasion on Don Diego's part to induce him to consent to restore Kate Marshall to freedom. The reader can be at no loss to comprehend that it was the name of Don Diego Christoval which Kate was about to pronounce, in the hope that it would have a certain effect in her favour upon Collantes,—at the very instant when the nobleman himself so timeously made his appearance.

The conference between Christoval and Collantes lasted but a few minutes; and when it was over, the former drew forth a pocket-book containing a number of bank-notes,—a large portion of which he insisted that Ramon should accept as the ransom money for Kate Marshall and to be shared amongst the band. Collantes at first positively refused to receive the bounty of his former chief; but Don Diego insisted;—and when Ramon made known to his followers the amount thereof, they once more surrounded the liberal donor, pouring forth their heartfelt gratitude.

In a few hasty words Don Diego informed Kate

Marshall that she was free—for which announcement she proffered the sincerest thanks and exhibited the liveliest joy. Christoval assured her that her post-chaise was still waiting in the road,—adding, "We must stay a few minutes to partake of refreshments with these people; or they will consider me churlish and unfriendly—and for the sake of old associations I am unwilling to earn their displeasure. Besides, you perceive, Miss Marshall, how advantageous it may be under certain circumstances to wield an influence over these wild Catalonian bands. Tarry you therefore until I take my departure; and I will escort you back to your vehicle."

Kate could not of course refuse; and Ramon de Collantes, now accosting her, expressed a hope that she would not bear him any ill will on account of his conduct towards her. She was in too good a humour at having regained her freedom, to give an unfavourable response; and she proffered him her hand as a proof that all was forgiven. The entire party then sat down to the banquet; and at the expiration of half-an-hour, Don Diego Christoval took his leave of his former friends, Miss Marshall accompanying him.

"And now, might I ask," he said, as he conducted her through the gorge, "how it is that I find you a traveller in my native land? Perhaps I may be of some service to you: for I presume it must be more on business than on pleasure that you are journeying thus alone?"

"Ah! my lord," responded Kate, a sudden gleam of hope lighting up her handsome features, which had become clouded as Christoval questioned her relative to her object in visting Spain,—"I am certain you could assist me! Your rank—your influence—your connexions, might be used for the best and kindest of purposes, and to save my happiness from becoming a total wreck!"

"Rest assured, Miss Marshall," responded Christoval, "that if I can thus forward your aims, I shall be truly delighted. But pray explain the peculiar circumstances to which you thus allude."

"I must inform your lordship," answered Kate, bending down her eyes, while a blush mantled upon her countenance,—"that I am engaged to be married to as gallant a sailor as ever dared the perils of the ocean. And a handsome man, too,—a generous and kind-hearted one,—is Edward Russell. He is the owner of a small trading-vessel, and commands it as its captain. By several voyages up the Mediterranean he has acquired some little property; and when he set out upon this present voyage, it was understood it was to be his last, provided success should still attend his ventures. It appears that poor Ned, anxious by a bold stroke to realize a considerable profit ere settling down in married life, freighted his vessel with a quantity of those English goods for which there is always a considerable contraband trade on the coast of Catalonia. It was in the middle of the night that he endeavoured to land his cargo about ten miles north of Barcelona: but it would appear that the revenue-officers had obtained an intimation of the design—for Russell and his crew were attacked while landing on the Spanish coast. They made a desperate defence—several of the Spanish officers were killed—but my unfortunate lover was overpowered by numbers and taken prisoner; while his men managed to reach the boat, push it off, and effect their escape to the vessel. The vessel itself got away after being chased by some Spanish cruisers; and poor Ned Russell was conducted a prisoner to Barcelona. There he lies in a dungeon! His trial will shortly come on——Alas! my lord, I dare not even allude to the probable result——or I should rather say the result that is *inevitable*, unless you will kindly interest yourself on our behalf. Yes—*our* behalf," added Kate, weeping; "because I feel that the death of *him* would be the death of *me*——And, oh! such a death—it is madness to think of it!"

"And you have journeyed all the way from England to see your lover?" said Don Diego, gazing with admiration upon the heroic young woman.

"The moment he was plunged into the gaol at Barcelona," responded Kate, "he wrote me a letter, breaking as delicately as he could the dreadful intelligence: for poor Ned feared that he should never see me more. And yet though in that letter he asked me not to come to him, his heart must have told him that I should do so——Yes, I should have come, were the distance even ten thousand times as great! he knows it, and expects me—I am sure he does!"

"Magnanimous young woman!" exclaimed the Count; "you shall have whatsoever little assistance I may be enabled to render you. But this, I fear," he added gloomily, "will scarcely avail under the peculiar circumstances of the present case: for as you tell me, there has been a conflict—blood was shed—lives were lost——"

"But Ned Russell's broad-sword slew not one of those unfortunate men!" Miss Marshall hastened to observe. "His weapon was drawn only in self-defence: he parried blows, but dealt none. His men took those lives that were lost——"

"This may be a consolation for *him* and for *you*, Miss Marshall," observed the Count; "but in the eye of the law it will scarcely be deemed a palliative of the offence, inasmuch as Captain Russell was the leader of those men who took these lives. However, the best that I can do shall be done."

"And my eternal gratitude is your lordship's due," answered Kate, with fervid enthusiasm.

"Surely, Miss Marshall," observed Don Diego, "you had some other hope of being enabled to interest yourself on behalf of your intended husband? If so, leave no stone unturned——"

"I had indeed some slight hope in a certain quarter," responded Kate. "The Marquis of Villebelle, the French *Chargé d'affaires*, at th Court of Madrid, is under some obligation to me on account of a certain matter wherein I was enabled a few months back to render him a little assistance——"

"The Marquis of Villebelle?" ejaculated Don Diego, to whose ear the name was well known, inasmuch as Elizabeth Paton had told him all her past history.

"Yes, my lord—it is he," rejoined Kate, "on whom I did somewhat reckon for succour in this dreadful dilemma. I know wherefore the name has thus startled you——"

"By all means," said the Count, "fail not to communicate with the Marquis—or see him—as soon as possible. Wherefore should you proceed first of all to Barcelona? wherefore not repair straight to Madrid?"

KATE MARSHALL

"I was bewildered, my lord—I knew not how to act," answered Kate, weeping. "Methought that the best course would be to visit poor Russell first of all—to ascertain precisely how matters stood ——for I am even in ignorance whether the trial has yet taken place or not——"

"Ah! if so—" interrupted Christoval: but he suddenly stopped short, fearing to shock the afflicted young woman; for what he was about to say was that the execution of the sentence would speedily follow its pronunciation.

"I know what your lordship means," murmured Kate. "What would you advise me to do?—shall I proceed to Barcelona? or shall I pursue the road to Madrid?"

Don Diego Christoval reflected for a few minutes; and then he said, "I have made up my mind what course I will pursue in the matter, and the line of conduct I shall counsel you to adopt. I will myself repair to Barcelona——"

"You, my lord?" cried Kate, with enthusiastic gratitude. "Oh, this kindness!—it can never be repaid!"

"Cheerfully will I interest myself on your behalf," responded Christoval. "Yes—I will proceed to Barcelona: the newly appointed Captain General of this principality is an acquaintance of mine; and I think I may faithfully promise that everything shall be suspended until after the result of the Marquis of Villebelle's appeal in Captain Russell's favour, to the supreme authorities at Madrid. For the Marquis *must* make this appeal at your intercession——"

"Oh! he will, he will!" exclaimed Kate: "I know that he will! And now there is hope! there is hope!"—and her countenance became radiant with joy.

By this time the gorge was passed—the grove was threaded—and the road reached. The two equipages were waiting; and after a little more conversation, during which Count Christoval gave Kate instructions how to proceed when she reached Madrid,—they were about to separate, when one of the brigands suddenly emerged from the wood with Miss Marshall's trunk upon his shoulder. This, in the liveliness of her joy at being rescued from Ramon's power, she had altogether forgotten: the banditti themselves had likewise forgotten it when she and Christoval had taken their leave: but scarcely had they departed from the spot, when Collantes remembered that the trunk was in his possession, and he lost no time in despatching one of his men in the direction of the road. It came just in time; and Miss Marshall, having once more expressed her fervid gratitude to Don Diego Christoval for the kindness he was showing her, proceeded in the post-chaise in the direction of Madrid, while the Count took the road to Barcelona.

On arriving in this city, Don Diego at once made inquiries respecting Captain Russell; and was much shocked on learning that the trial had taken place on the previous day—that sentence of death had been pronounced—and that the culprit was to be executed, by the strangling process of the *garotte*, on the following morning: that is to say, the morning after the Count's arrival in Barcelona. He lost not a moment in visiting the palace of the Captain-General—not the same, be it well understood, who was governor of the principality at the time when Christoval was an outlaw amongst the mountains. The present Captain-General had only recently been appointed to his present post; and Don Diego had met him in society at Madrid. The General knew everything in favour of Don Diego, and nothing to his discredit: or if he were at all informed on the latter point, he did not choose to remember it on the part of one who was now possessed of considerable wealth. He therefore received the Count with becoming courtesy: but he shook his head when the latter unfolded to him the nature of his business.

"It is impossible, my dear Count," answered the Captain-General: "I dare not suspend the execution of the sentence. You are aware the smuggling on this coast has of late years reached a pitch perfectly intolerable; and even without collateral circumstances of a dark nature, it would be necessary to make an example. But in the present instance there *are* these circumstances; and they are of the blackest dye. Three lives were lost——"

"I am aware of it—too painfully aware of it," responded Christoval: "but your Excellency must bear in mind that the unfortunate prisoner only acted in self-defence, and could not restrain his own men."

"All this was alleged on his behalf at the trial yesterday," responded the Captain-General: "but it could not be denied that he was the leader of the men by whom the slaughter was perpetrated: it was his own vessel whence the landing was effected—his own goods that were attempted to be run ashore. No, Count Christoval—it is impossible—I cannot suspend this sentence!"

"I know not how I can persevere in beseeching your Excellency to grant me the boon I solicit," resumed Don Diego: "but nevertheless, I am emboldened to be thus urgent, because I have before me the image of the young woman who said so emphatically that *his* death would be *her* death likewise."

"And you tell me, Count," said the Captain-General, evidently deliberating within himself, "that this young woman feels confident of being enabled to enlist the interest of the French Embassy on behalf of the prisoner?"

"I have the positive certainty that she will thus far succeed," responded Christoval: "therefore, again do I conjure your Excellency to adopt a merciful view!"

The Captain-General paced to and fro in the spacious apartment for several minutes; and at length stopping short, he said, "Count Christoval, I grant your request. I will order the execution of the sentence to be suspended. Do you wish to see the prisoner? If so, you shall yourself convey to him the announcement that he is respited for the present—that is to say, until the result of an appeal which is being made on his behalf at Madrid, can be known in Barcelona."

"I thank your Excellency for this additional proof of kindness," answered Christoval; "and I will lose no time in visiting the prisoner."

The Captain-General furnished Don Diego with the necessary authority to see Russell; and the Count proceeded at once to the gaol in which the prisoner was incarcerated. He was escorted by a turnkey to the massively-built dungeon where

Kate's lover, heavily ironed, was seated in gloomy reflection. The unhappy man had heard his death-sentence pronounced: he saw not the slightest hope of escape from the dreadful doom thus decreed. But it was not that he feared to die on his own account: he knew that his limbs would not tremble, nor his nerves quiver, when ascending the ladder of the scaffold: it was on behalf of Kate—handsome and well-beloved Kate, once so gay and mirthful—that he was thus deeply despondent. He was, as she had described him, a fine handsome fellow—somewhat coarse-featured, it is true, but with the frank, open, honest look of an English sailor, and with a form the manly symmetry of which was not even concealed by the loose apparel that he wore. He was accustomed, on board his vessel, to wear the simple habiliments of a British tar; and it was in that raiment he had been captured—this raiment that clothed him now.

Count Christoval was, as the reader is aware, a perfect stranger to Ned Russell: but they were not many minutes alone together, before the generous-hearted Spanish nobleman won the grateful esteem of the English mariner. And tears, too, trickled down Ned Russell's sun-burnt countenance, on learning that his own Kate had travelled all the way from England, not merely to see him, but likewise to interest herself on his behalf.

CHAPTER CXLII.

THE LONELY INN.

The reader cannot do otherwise than admire the courage of Kate Marshall, in having undertaken this journey from her own native land to foreign climes on behalf of her lover. Though perfectly ignorant both of the French and Spanish tongues, she had nevertheless made her way through almost the entire length of France; and we now behold her pursuing her travel in Spain. She had set out with no companion to cheer her—with no friend to succour, guide, or defend her. Her father was laid up with a severe attack of the gout at the time she left Dover—otherwise he would have accompanied her: her mother was compelled to remain at home in superintendence of the establishment; and it would have been useless, as well as expensive, for Kate to bring any one of her sisters with her. Therefore was it that she travelled alone,—her only aids being a courageous spirit and a well-filled purse.

As may be supposed, her fortune at meeting with Don Diego Christoval had cheered her considerably,—not merely because he was the means of rescuing her from the power of the Catalan bandits, but likewise because he had so generously volunteered to interest himself to the utmost of his power in the cause of Ned Russell. Kate therefore pursued her journey with brighter hopes than she had previously entertained; and what with the good offices of Count Christoval at Barcelona, and the succour which she expected to receive from the Marquis of Villebella at Madrid, the heroic young woman was very far from despairing of ultimate success in saving her lover's life. There was much in her character to admire, notwithstanding that, by the way in which she had been brought up, she was not over nice nor particular in certain respects. For instance, smuggling in her eyes was no moral offence; and we have seen her laugh approvingly at the dashing exploits of her former friend and school-companion Elisabeth Paton. But in that virtue which constitutes the chief ornament of the sex, Kate Marshall's character was unimpeachable: never had she strayed from the path of chastity—never had she given encouragement to any libertine look that was fixed upon her. Even before she was engaged to Ned Russell, her behaviour in this respect was most scrupulously proper; and the same may be said of her sisters. She moreover possessed a generous heart and kind disposition: the reader is already aware that she did not lack courage: and thus if her merits were weighed against her faults, it would be impossible to refuse her some slight meed of admiration.

Having parted with Don Diego Christoval in the manner already described, Kate pursued her journey in the chaise. Hours passed—the evening came—and as the dusk closed in, she could not help observing that the road was much narrower than the highway had hitherto appeared to be: indeed, it had rather the appearance of a lane than of the main route. In a few minutes the chaise entered the precincts of a forest: the shade of the huge trees completely shut out the twilight: she was enveloped in darkness. The position was far from an agreeable one. Utterly unacquainted with the Spanish language—and the two muleteers being equally unable to answer her in her own native tongue—she could not question them as to whether they were pursuing the right road. At the several places where the cattle were changed since she parted from Don Christoval, the single word "Madrid," pronounced by her lips, had served as an indication of the direction in which she was to be borne: but she was now seized with misgivings as to the good faith of the muleteers belonging to the last relay—all the terrific tales she had ever read of travellers being murdered in lonely places on the Continent, trooped into her memory—and notwithstanding her courageous disposition, she could not prevent the darkest suspicions from arising in her mind. She had no defensive weapon; and she regretted that she had not provided herself therewith: for though she might be certain to succumb beneath the murderous attack of the muleteers, if such were intended,—it would nevertheless be some satisfaction to possess the means of selling her life as dearly as possible.

While all these reflections were passing through her mind, she suddenly perceived through the chaise-window a light glimmering at a little distance on the right hand; and in a few minutes the lumbering equipage stopped in front of what appeared to be a small inn or public-house. Kate's spirits instantaneously rose again, as the thought struck her that her fears were groundless after all, and that this must be the place where fresh cattle were to be obtained: for she had resolved to tarry not on the route, but to journey straight on with the least possible delay towards the Spanish capital. She did not therefore intend to alight,—but remained seated inside the vehicle, hoping that it would soon be in motion again.

A man and a woman—both of about middle age, and by their appearance evidently the master and mistress of the little inn—came forth with a lantern. Some conversation took place between these persons and the muleteers; and then one of the latter, approaching the vehicle, opened the door and made signs for Miss Marshall to descend. The innkeeper and his wife saluted her with as much courtesy as it was in their nature to display, and also by signs testified their readiness to conduct her into the hostelry. Thinking that it was imagined she needed refreshments,—but having partaken of some at the previous halting-place,—she intimated by signs as well as she was able that she was in a hurry to proceed: whereupon the muleteers,—pointing to their own cattle, and then in the direction of the stable joining the inn—shook their heads, as much as to imply that there was no relay to be had. Kate understood what was meant, and felt sadly perplexed. Oh! if she could but converse with these people in their own language, so as to ascertain how long she was to make up her mind to be delayed: but she could not glean this information—and her only resource was to conjecture that the journey might be renewed at the expiration of an hour or two, when the mules had enjoyed rest and bait. She accordingly followed the innkeeper and his wife into the house, where she was shown to a room on the ground-floor; and without any sign or intimation from herself, a young servant-woman began to spread the table for supper.

Spain is notorious for the indifferent accommodation of its hotels, inns, and taverns, even in the largest and most populous cities: but the secluded and inferior kinds of hostelries are of the very worst and poorest description. The one where Miss Marshall now found herself, was decidedly no exception to the general rule. The room was only lighted by a single candle, and wore the most poverty-stricken appearance, without even the recommendation of cleanliness as a set-off against its sordid aspect and poor accommodation. A few ricketty chairs, a rude table, and a dilapidated side-board, constituted the furniture: while a few miserable prints, representing scriptural scenes, served as embellishments for the walls. There was no drapery to the window; and two of the panes being broken, were stopped up with rags stuffed through,—recourse not even being had to the expedient of pasting paper over the apertures.

Kate sat down, dispirited and uneasy. She liked not this halt in so lonely a place: she could not prevent her previous suspicions from reviving in her mind: for she felt almost convinced that the high road had been deviated from—and the longer she reflected on this circumstance, the more ominous did it appear. By the light of the lantern when she first descended from the vehicle, she had observed the countenances of the innkeeper and his wife; and they were not over prepossessing. She now studied the features of the attendant who was spreading the table. This was a girl of about eighteen—decidedly pretty—but with one of those countenances which are too inexpressive, too quiet and reserved, to afford much indication of the individual's character. She was attired in a very homely manner, but yet with a certain degree of neatness: her figure was light and graceful; and the short petticoats revealed all the lower part of her symmetrical limbs. Indeed, the skirt of her dress did not descend below the middle of the swell of the leg,—thus completely displaying the well-turned ankles. She walked with steps of elastic firmness—carried her head and shoulders well—and, altogether, in personal appearance, was far from uninteresting. She said not a word,—probably having been already informed that the lady-guest was a foreigner and spoke not the Spanish tongue: but every now and then she fixed her dark eyes with an apparent curiosity upon Miss Marshall.

The viands which the girl placed upon the table, were by no means calculated to provoke an appetite; and indeed Kate was in no humour to touch them at all, even if they had been more inviting. She however took something on her plate, so as not to give offence by altogether repudiating the fare; and when the supper was over, the mistress of the inn made her appearance. Her countenance was very much flushed—she had a strange vacant look—and for the first few moments, Kate could not comprehend what was the matter with her. She was not however long at a loss to discover the cause of the woman's excitement: for the smell of her breath and her unsteady movements showed that she was considerably under the influence of liquor. Disgusted beyond expression, Miss Marshall recoiled from the woman's approach: but the latter was too far inebriated to notice the sentiment of loathing which her presence thus inspired. Taking up the candle, she beckoned Kate to follow her: but as Miss Marshall hesitated—not exactly understanding what this new proceeding meant—the woman made signs to show that she purposed to conduct her to a bed-chamber.

Kate was now more than ever a prey to unpleasant misgivings, when she found it was intended that she should pass the night at that lonely inn in the depth of a forest. She issued from the room; and repairing to the place which had already been pointed out to her as the stable, found the muleteers attending to their animals by the light of a lantern suspended to the roof. She pointed to the mules, and then to the chaise which remained standing in front of the hostelry: but the drivers gave her to understand, as well as they were able, that it was their intention to pass the night at the inn. She assumed a peremptory air, again indicating the animals and the vehicle, and making every possible sign to show her anxiety to proceed. The manner in which they shook their heads, was that of dogged determination; and Kate, finding that it was useless to urge them farther, beckoned them to bring her trunk from the chaise into the hostelry. This was at once done; and the inebriate landlady guided the fellow who bore the box, up the narrow and dilapidated staircase. Kate followed; and in a few moments was left alone in a wretchedly furnished little bedroom. The candle, which the mistress of the tavern had placed upon the table, dimly lighted that gloomy-looking and poverty-stricken chamber. Kate sat down, and abandoned herself to her reflections. Her mind was still full of misgivings: but with her natural courage, she endeavoured to reason herself out of them. She had already received experience to the effect that the roads were bad, and the posting-arrangements for travelling wretchedly incomplete, in Spain:—might it

not therefore be, after all, that the highway did really run in the form of a narrow road through this forest? and that previous travellers on this particular day had exhausted the relays of cattle? She had noticed that the stable was a spacious one, and such as might be expected to belong to a posting-house: she had likewise observed that the mules recently unharnessed from the chaise in which she travelled, were the only cattle at present in that stable. Then, too, she argued that the muleteers might not choose to carry their beasts another stage until the morning: or else that the arrival of fresh animals, which might be expected in the night, must be awaited in order to furnish a relay. Such were the conjectures by means of which Kate endeavoured to reassure herself: and then she again thought of the people of the house. It was true that the master and the mistress were of no very prepossessing countenances: but it did did not follow that they should be criminal on that account. The woman was evidently a drunkard: but it was not to be thence inferred that she was anything worse. Besides, there was something interesting about the servant-girl: it was scarcely possible for any crime to be committed beneath that roof without this girl's knowledge; and Kate Marshall did not think so ill of human nature as to suppose that one of her years and appearance was an habitual accomplice in deeds of turpitude.

These were the reflections which her natural courage and intelligence suggested: but still they were not potent enough to reason away the dark suspicions and gloomy apprehensions which had forced themselves upon her mind. What, however, was she to do? To ensure her safety by flight, was out of the question. She could not quit the hostelry unperceived; and if she were indeed in a nest of robbers and murderers—she shuddered at the idea—they would not hesitate to pounce upon her and consummate their purposed criminality at once if she were to make an attempt at escape. It was therefore absolutely necessary to remain and risk whatsoever perils might menace her. As for putting off her apparel and retiring to rest—as she had at first intended when ordering her box to be brought into the hostelry—it was out of the question. She felt that if she went to bed, she could not sleep;—and moreover, haunted by misgivings as she was, she must sit up so as to be prepared for anything that might occur.

She rose from her seat to examine the door: but fastenings there were none. This was a circumstance that did not however tend to confirm her apprehensions, inasmuch as it was by no means likely that such a poverty-stricken place would be furnished with any means of security of that kind. She looked at her watch: it was now half-past ten o'clock;—and the sound of voices reached her ears from below. She gently opened the door, and listened: the muleteers, the master, and mistress of the hostelry were laughing and talking—most probably drinking together. Yes, they were drinking: for Kate now caught the sounds of bottles and mugs; and the odour of tobacco smoke likewise reached her. She thought to herself that if those persons were thus indulging in an orgie, it was by no means likely they had any criminal intentions.

Still she resolved not to be thrown off her guard. The window was at the back of the house: she opened it gently and looked forth; the giant-trees of the forest were dimly seen through the deep gloom of night. Again the thought of escape entered her mind: but she knew not what might be the height of this window from the ground in the rear of the dwelling. The level of that ground might be much lower than in front: the descent from the casement would therefore be perilous to a degree;—and besides, the savage growling of a dog now reached her ears. She shut the window, and sat down again. Notwithstanding her courage, poor Kate was much dispirited. Even if she were assured of her own personal safety, the delay thus experienced in her journey was sufficient to trouble her sorely. Was it not a matter of life or death on which she was bound? was it not to save one who was dearer to her than her own existence?—and therefore, was not her time most precious? And how, too, was she to while away the long mortal hours that must elapse ere morning dawned? She felt fatigued—but dared not lie down to rest: she needed slumber to enable her to sustain the fatigues of the long journey which yet lay before her—but she felt like a person benighted amongst the snows of Alpine regions, where to yield to sleep is to meet certain death. And then, too, she was tortured with the reflection that even if this night should pass away in safety for herself, and that the advent of the morn should enable her to smile at the fears which had haunted her,—she might, after all in the meantime undergone, experience failure in her attempt to save the man whom she loved so well: she might in the end be doomed to encounter the saddest and bitterest disappointment! A few hours back her heart had been elate with hope: but now this hope succumbed beneath the dispiriting influences which surrounded her, and became absorbed in the general despondency which engulfed her soul.

Wearily, wearily did the minutes drag their slow length along: again she looked at her watch in the hope that at least an hour had elapsed since last she consulted it: but only half that period had fled—it was eleven o'clock. The sounds of voices still came from below: once more she opened the door to listen; and she heard the mistress of the hostelry talking in the thick, stammering, hiccupping manner of complete intoxication. Closing the door again, she took from her trunk a book for the purpose of whiling away the time in its perusal: but she could not settle her attention upon its pages; and once more she found herself debating upon the circumstances in which she was placed. She remembered that these muleteers who accompanied this last relay, had seen her draw forth her well-filled purse: she regretted that she had thus displayed it;—and yet she reasoned that even if she had not done so, they must naturally suppose she had ample funds to meet the expenses of her mode of travelling.

Another half-hour passed; and Kate Marshall no longer heard the sounds of voices coming from below. She was almost inclined to lie down and repose her wearied frame: she was deliberating with herself whether by piling her trunk and what little furniture there was in the room against the door, she might not be enabled to guard against a surprise,—when she heard light footsteps approaching across the landing outside.

The latch was raised gently—the servant-girl appeared upon the threshold—and as the light of the candle burning upon the table, reached her countenance, Kate immediately saw that it was very pale. Indeed there was something of subdued horror and deep dismay in the hitherto inexpressive features of the young Spanish woman: so that Miss Marshall was at once smitten with the conviction that peril menaced herself, but that she had found a friend in this girl. The latter—whose name we may as well state to be Paquetta—laid her finger upon her lip, which was naturally of bright vermilion hue, but now ashy colourless, and quivering also: then advancing into the room, she made a sign for Kate not to be alarmed, and extinguished the light. At the same moment she took Miss Marshall's hand, and gently led her forth from the chamber. The crazy boards creaked beneath their feet, light though their steps were; and Paquetta squeezed Kate's hand as an intimation that everything depended upon the noiselessness of their tread. They ascended another flight of stairs: the girl opened a door, still maintaining the utmost caution; and Miss Marshall was guided into a miserable attic where a light was burning. This was evidently Paquetta's own chamber.

Having closed the door as noiselessly as she had opened it, Paquetta made Kate sit down upon the mean and sordid bed: then placing herself by her side, she gazed upon her with a look of mingled compassion, interest, and affright. Having now more leisure to contemplate the girl, Miss Marshall saw that there was evidently a profound horror and dismay influencing her; and, Oh! how earnestly she wished that they could understand each other by means of language, so that explanations on Paquetta's part might relieve Kate from the terrible suspense which was devouring her. She however comprehended sufficient to be aware that the girl was acting a friendly part towards her, and that the present proceeding was undertaken with the hope of rescuing her from some danger—but of what nature, could not be exactly conceived, though it was scarcely difficult to surmise that it was threatened on the part of the people of the house. Kate, taking the girl's hand, pressed it warmly; and by her looks endeavoured to show the amount of gratitude she felt towards her.

Paquetta, again making a sign that the utmost caution must be observed, went to the door—opened it gently—and listened. All however was still; and having closed the door again, she made another sign to the effect that it was necessary to extinguish the light, but that Kate must not suspect her of any treachery. She took Miss Marshall's hand—pressed it to her bosom—and with a look full of eloquence, gave her to understand that she would lay down her own life sooner than injure her. She then extinguished the candle; and the chamber was enveloped in total darkness.

Almost immediately afterwards, steps were heard ascending the lower flight of stairs; and by their uneven pace, and the sounds of a person staggering and stumbling about, Kate had no difficulty in judging that it was the drunken landlady. A door opened and shut on the landing below—the same landing as that on which was situated the chamber whence Miss Marshall had been so mysteriously and ominously fetched away. Then all was still again; and half-an-hour elapsed, during which Kate and Paquetta sat side by side upon the bed,—the latter holding the hands of the former with a kind of firm convulsing pressure in her own. By the way the girl breathed—by the frequent quick starts she gave, as she doubtless fancied she heard some ominous sound—Miss Marshall conjectured that she was expecting something terrible to take place; and it may easily be supposed that her suspense was of the most poignant character—her feelings wrought up to a pitch that was scarcely tolerable. Indeed, the sensation she endured, transcends all power of description: the hideous conviction of imminent danger was excruciating to her soul; and the torture thereof was still more exquisitely refined—rendered still more keen and goading—by the vagueness of her ideas as to what the precise nature of that danger could be. That she was really in a nest of murderers, she could scarcely doubt: whether she should ever go forth thence alive, was involved in a horrible uncertainty: how the Spanish girl hoped to save her by the mere change of one room to another, she could not possibly imagine.

We said that about half-an-hour passed from the moment that the ascent of the inebriate mistress of the hostelry was heard,—half-an-hour of complete silence through the house, but of torturing, rending, excruciating suspense for Kate Marshall—and likewise, as it appeared, for her Spanish companion. At the expiration of that interval, a faint sound—like the creaking of a footstep upon the stairs below—reached their ears. Kate's breath was suspended: nor could she catch the breathing of the girl, which was evidently suspended also:—but she felt the clasp of her companion's fingers tighten spasmodically on her own hands, as if under the influence of intense and awful horror. They listened, we say, with suspended breath: Miss Marshall felt her bosom upheaved, as it were, with that terrible state of mind,—upheaved, and remaining so; for a fearful consternation was upon her. Paquetta drew closer to her—now clinging to her as if conscious that something dreadful was occurring or about to take place. And there, in the darkness were they enshrouded,—in the black darkness which the shade of the trees produced, shutting out whatsoever glimmering light there might be of moon or stars on the face of heaven. And that darkness appeared to be of even Egyptian depth—a darkness that might be felt: for it was associated with the idea that some crime of congenial blackness was about to be consummated!

And now a door was heard to creak on its hinges on the landing below; all was still again for a few instants—and then followed stifling, suffocating sounds, accompanied by strugglings, as of two human beings together, one endeavouring to smother out the life from the other. And therewith was blended the noise of a bed agitating, and creaking, and swaying to and fro, beneath the weight of the strugglers;—and this lasted for more than a minute, during which Paquetta clung with the tenacity of horror and affright to Kate Marshall,—thus clinging with her left arm, while her right hand was placed upon Kate's mouth—a dread and significant intimation that no word nor cry must go forth thence. But from the girl's dreadful condition of mind altogether, Kate could not help

fancying, even amidst her own horrible thoughts, that something was taking place different from what her companion had at first apprehended, and of a nature which, though fully sustaining the tenseness of her feelings, had nevertheless turned them all into another channel.

Those sounds had ceased: stillness prevailed again for a few moments; and then a sudden ejaculation of horror rang through the house. But at the very same moment, the rapid trampling of horses reached the ears of the appalled and dismayed Paquetta and Kate. Those steeds galloped up to the front of the tavern; and then the Spanish girl, with an exclamation of joy, sprang to the window—threw it open—and looking forth, cried out something, which, by its rending tones of entreaty, struck Kate as being a prayer for succour. She also flew to the little latticed casement, which was in the front of the house; and flinging her glances forth, she felt that she was saved: for the rays of a light gleaming from one of the lower windows, were reflected by the sword-hilts of a body of mounted police.

The door of the hostelry was immediately burst in by these officials; and Paquetta, flinging herself with wild joy upon Kate's bosom, fainted in her arms.

CHAPTER CXLIII.

EXPLANATIONS.

Infinite were the confusion, the din, and the bustle which followed this forcible entry of the Spanish *gendarmes* into the tavern. Kate, while doing her best to restore her companion to consciousness, heard the rush of footsteps up the first flight of stairs—also the loud and menacing voices of the police, and the despairing ejaculations of the landlord. In a few minutes hasty and heavy footsteps ascended the flight to the attic—the door opened—and a *gendarme*, with a candle, appeared upon the threshold. He spoke to Kate Marshall: but she understood him not—and shook her head to make him comprehend that she was a foreigner unacquainted with the Spanish tongue. At this conjuncture Paquetta came back to consciousness: the light which the official carried, showed Kate where there was a pitcher of water in the room: she hastened to give the young woman some of it to drink—and in a few minutes more she was completely recovered. Then Paquetta and the *gendarme* exchanged rapid observations; and the official beckoned her and Kate to descend.

They obeyed his signal; and on reaching the landing below, they perceived the innkeeper in the custody of two of the police. Despair and horror were depicted upon his countenance: he looked the most abject wretch alive. A glance, flung down the staircase, showed Kate that the two muleteers were also in the hands of other officers; and thus was it but too evident that she had experienced a truly miraculous escape from the hands of a set of murderous monsters. But there was yet another phase in the night's proceedings to meet her view. For on the bed in the room originally allotted to herself, and whence Paquetta had so noiselessly and mysteriously conducted her away—upon that bed was stretched the corpse of the landlady, her countenance blackened and swollen, presenting a hideous and loathsome spectacle, with all the evidences of having been smothered or strangled. Now did the terrific truth flash to the comprehension of the horrified Kate Marshall—the mystery was cleared up—she comprehended it all!

The measures of the *gendarmes* were promptly taken. A couple of them hastened to attach the mules to the vehicle; and into this Kate Marshall and Paquetta, by their direction, entered. Kate's trunk was not forgotten: indeed she was treated with the utmost courtesy and respect; and she comprehended that it was as a witness her presence was thus to be required elsewhere. One of the *gendarmes* drove the chaise: the muleteers and the innkeeper, their arms pinioned with cords, were compelled to march on foot in the midst of the mounted band of police, who took good care to keep a firm hold of the long ends of the ropes which bound them. We should add that no other persons belonged to the hostelry besides those already mentioned,—the landlord himself having been accustomed to act as his own hostler—the murdered woman and the servant-girl performing all the domestic duties of so limited an establishment. Before the party quitted the house where the terrific tragedy had occurred, the doors were carefully secured, the police taking the keys away with them,—thus leaving the corpse of the murdered woman behind.

As the chaise rolled on through the darkness of the forest, Kate Marshall testified to the utmost of her power the immensity of that gratitude which she experienced towards her young companion, to whom she indeed deeply felt that she owed her life. She embraced her—she pressed her hands to her lips—she caressed her in the most affectionate and endearing manner; she could not lavish too many proofs of friendship, love, and attachment upon one to whom she lay under such incalculable obligations. Paquetta had by this time recovered her fortitude and presence of mind; and the joy she experienced on account of the providential arrival of the *gendarmes*, absorbed a portion of the otherwise stupendous horror which the tragedy was but too well calculated to excite. Such was also the case with Miss Marshall; and her deliverance from the dreadful dangers which had evidently menaced her, appeared to have the force and significancy of an omen of good in respect to the enterprise which she had in hand on behalf of her lover.

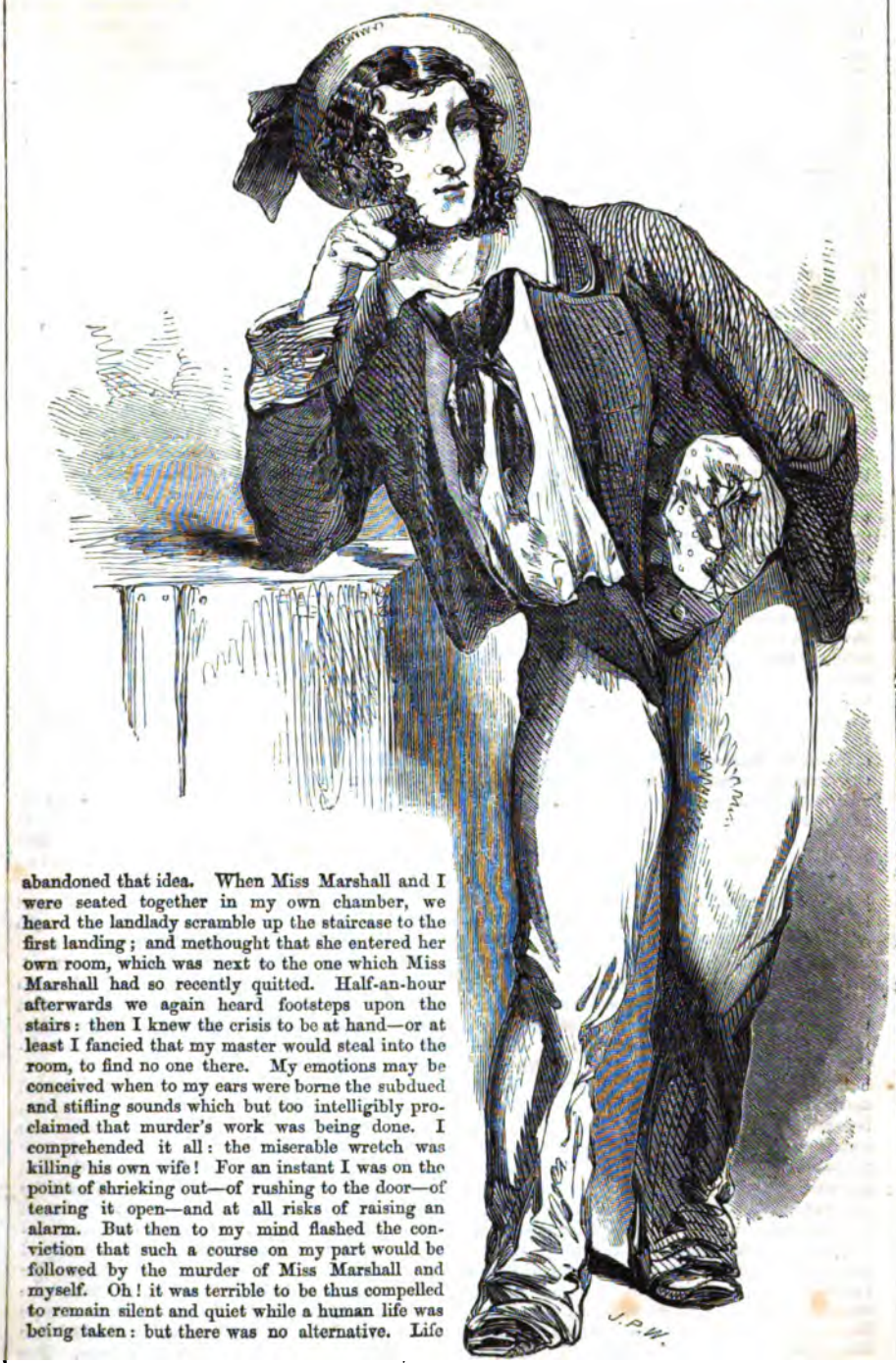
The equipage and the police, with their prisoners, proceeded to the nearest town, which was about three miles distant,—beyond the verge of the forest, and situated on the highway. Indeed, as Kate subsequently discovered, this was the town where she ought to have halted, had not the muleteers diverged from the proper route to take her to a den where murderous work was purposed to be done—and where indeed a victim had been made that night, though not the one whom blackest turpitude had intended to immolate to its greed for gold. On reaching this town, the equipage stopped at a tavern, the inmates of which were summoned from their beds to receive the guests: for Paquetta remained there with Kate Marshall. A chamber was speedily provided for

them; and they shared the same couch—while the police conducted their prisoners to the gaol.

On the following morning Miss Marshall and Paquetta were summoned to the office of the Alcalde, or Mayor, who was prepared to examine into the occurrences of the preceding night. An interpreter was present to assist Miss Marshall in making her deposition; and through this medium she explained how the muleteers had borne her to the lonely hostelry in the forest—how she was compelled to remain there—and the incidents which had subsequently taken place, until the arrival of the *gendarmes*. From this same interpreter she afterwards learnt those particulars which we shall proceed to record. But first of all we must observe that the muleteers, confessing their guilt, revealed such details as threw additional light upon the character of the hostelry and the previous night's tragedy.

It appeared that the innkeeper and his wife had tenanted that hostelry for about a dozen years, during which time they were in league with several muleteers of the district, who were frequently in the habit of conveying unwary foreigners to that den of iniquity, where the unfortunate victims were murdered for the sake of whatsoever they might have about them. Until within six months of the date of which we are writing, no servants were kept at the hostelry: but in consequence of the intemperate habits of the woman, her husband was at length compelled to take a female assistant. Through the recommendation of a shopkeeper in the town—who little knew, however, to what a place he was sending a servant—Paquetta obtained the situation; and during those six months that she was there, she saw nothing to excite her suspicions as to the evil character of her master and mistress. On the particular night to which we are referring, Paquetta overheard some observation between the innkeeper and his wife, immediately after Kate Marshall's arrival, which suddenly filled her with the darkest misgiving. She however had presence of mind sufficient to conceal the suspicion which had thus been engendered; but she resolved to remain on the watch. Though the words which had caught her ears, were vague and indistinct, she nevertheless felt assured that Miss Marshall's life was menaced: and this idea, agitating in her mind, will account for those looks of interest which she fixed upon Kate when laying the supper-cloth, and which Kate mistook for regards of curiosity. At one moment Paquetta thought of flying from the hostelry and hastening to the town, to give information to the police: but at that late hour she feared to venture through the forest—she moreover dreaded lest she should be pursued and overtaken by the landlord, who in that case would have secured his own safety by making away with her: and in addition to these reasons for abandoning her first thought of flight, was the consideration that she might, after all, be mistaken, and had put a wrong meaning on the few vague and indistinct words which her ear had caught. So she tarried at the hostelry—and kept upon the watch. After Kate had been conducted up to the bed-chamber, the girl listed to what was going on, but without being observed; and her worst fears were speedily confirmed. She heard her master speak to the muleteers in a way which corroborated her dark suspicions: she caught the whispered explanation which the landlord gave of how the plan was to be carried out.

"He said,"—quoting Paquetta's own words in giving her deposition to the Alcalde,—"care must be taken that I should obtain no inkling of what was going on: it was therefore too dangerous to cut the Englishwoman's throat, as it would be impossible to efface the stains of blood. He accordingly declared his intention of stealing into her chamber when she was asleep, and smothering her with a bolster. This, he said, he felt convinced of being able to do without any noise to alarm me. The remainder of the plan was thus laid down:—the muleteers were to get the equipage ready at about two in the morning; the corpse should be placed inside the vehicle, to be borne into the depths of the forest, and there buried: and when I came down at the usual hour in the morning, I was to be told that the traveller had taken her departure, leaving a gratuity for me, which trifling sum the landlord would accordingly place in my hand. Such was the horrible project which I overheard: and for a while I was utterly bewildered how to act. I was nevertheless determined to do all I could to save the English lady, even though the attempt should fail and my own life should be forfeited to my master's vengeance. I saw that there were no means of issuing forth unperceived from the house—no means therefore of getting Miss Marshall off in safety. The only chance of accomplishing my purpose," continued Paquetta, "was to induce Miss Marshall to remove stealthily up into my own chamber. I calculated that when my master should penetrate into her room and find she was not there, he would conclude that she had by some means or another suspected his design and made her escape. I also reasoned to myself that if he should come up to my door and ask whether I had seen her, he would be contented with the denial which I should boldly and firmly give; and as he had no reason to suppose that I had been a listener to his plans, there was the greater probability of his putting faith in that denial on my part, and adopting the conclusion that the lady had escaped of her own accord and unassisted by any one else. I accordingly entered Miss Marshall's chamber, expecting to find that she had at least laid herself down, even if she were not disapparelled: I was therefore surprised to find her sitting up. It was however all the more suitable to my purpose, inasmuch as there was no need for delay; and as I saw at once that some suspicion was agitating in her own mind, I had not the slightest trouble in making her comprehend the necessity of following me. I extinguished the light in her room, so as to create as much confusion as possible on the part of my master when he should proceed thither; and by bewildering him to the utmost of my power, render him all the more accessible to the belief that Miss Marshall had fled. For a moment I entertained the idea of putting open the window of her room—tying the bed-clothes together—and letting them hang forth, to confirm the impression that she had escaped: but a second thought convinced me that this stratagem would defeat itself, inasmuch as there was a savage dog in the back premises that would have torn her to pieces if she had really sought to fly in that direction. I therefore



abandoned that idea. When Miss Marshall and I were seated together in my own chamber, we heard the landlady scramble up the staircase to the first landing; and methought that she entered her own room, which was next to the one which Miss Marshall had so recently quitted. Half-an-hour afterwards we again heard footsteps upon the stairs: then I knew the crisis to be at hand—or at least I fancied that my master would steal into the room, to find no one there. My emotions may be conceived when to my ears were borne the subdued and stifling sounds which but too intelligibly proclaimed that murder's work was being done. I comprehended it all: the miserable wretch was killing his own wife! For an instant I was on the point of shrieking out—of rushing to the door—of tearing it open—and at all risks of raising an alarm. But then to my mind flashed the conviction that such a course on my part would be followed by the murder of Miss Marshall and myself. Oh! it was terrible to be thus compelled to remain silent and quiet while a human life was being taken: but there was no alternative. Life

is dear to me: I had vowed also to do my best to save Miss Marshall's;—and shocking though it were to adopt such a course, it was absolutely necessary to suffer *one* life to be smothered away, rather than ensure the certain taking of *two*—and one of these two my own! The wild cry which burst from the landlord's lips bore to my ears the conviction that he had *just then* discovered his horrible mistake; and while that cry was yet ringing through the house, the body of *gendarmes* galloped up to the door. Not an instant did I lose in speaking to them from the window, and imploring succour, as murder was being done beneath that roof: and it must have been Providence itself who sent them at that critical moment to bait their horses at the inn,—for it was the means of ensuring our safety and uprooting a nest of assassins."

But little more remains to be told in order to make the reader fully acquainted with the details of that tragedy in the Spanish forest. From the statement of one of the muleteers it was gathered—as indeed previously surmised—that the inn-keeper's wife, being completely overcome with liquor, was ordered by her husband to get up to bed, so that the house might be quiet and the murderous scheme carried into execution as soon as possible. It was but too clear that the miserable woman staggered into the first chamber to the door of which her uncertain steps brought her; and throwing herself upon the bed, at once fell into a profound sleep. From this slumber she was only awakened for a few swift brief passing moments, to struggle and writhe in death-agonies beneath the bolster which her miscreant husband retained with tremendous force over her countenance. There can be little doubt that on her ceasing to move, he felt amongst her garments for the purse which he supposed to be concealed there; and that the texture of the raiment suddenly sent the hideous, horrible, blasting conviction to his mind that it was his own wife whom he had thus assassinated!

All the depositions being duly taken down in the presence of the Mayor, Miss Marshall intimated, through the medium of the interpreter, that it was of vital consequence for her to be allowed to continue her journey to Madrid; and she therefore hoped that the purposes of justice might be served without any farther detention on her part. This request was promptly acceded to,—there being ample evidence against the accused to ensure their conviction. The Mayor was so much pleased with the conduct of Paquetta throughout the transaction, that he introduced her to his wife, who proposed to take her into her service in the capacity of lady's-maid. The girl, being an orphan, and entirely dependent on her own resources, joyfully and gratefully accepted the proposition. Before parting from Paquetta, Kate Marshall—speaking by means of the interpreter—offered to make her a present of as large a sum from her purse as she could possibly spare: but the young Spanish girl replied, through the same medium, that these were services which one fellow-creature could render to another of too holy and sacred a character to be recompensed by gold; and that the service she had been enabled to afford Miss Marshall was one of these. In short she positively declined to accept anything; and Kate parted from her with the most affectionate and lively demonstrations of gratitude.

In order to finish this episode without the necessity of recurring to it, we may as well observe that in the course of a few weeks after the tragedy in the forest, the innkeeper and the two muleteers expiated their crimes upon the scaffold,—death being inflicted by the infamous process of the garotte.

CHAPTER CXLIV.

THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR.

KATE MARSHALL arrived safely in the Spanish capital; and took up her residence at a modest but respectable tavern to which Count Christoval had directed her amongst other parting instructions which he had given her in Catalonia. One of the principal reasons which he had for recommending her to this hostelry, was that the landlady spoke English with tolerable accuracy; and being a good-hearted woman, was certain to afford Miss Marshall all necessary aid and information.

It was night when Kate arrived at Madrid on the day after the examination by the Alcalde; and on the following morning she repaired, with the hotel-porter as her guide, to the residence of the Marquis of Villebelle. Infinite was her disappointment on learning that this nobleman had left the day before for Paris, in company with the Marchioness; and that they were likely to remain absent for six weeks—even if the Marquis should return to that diplomatic post at all, he having the prospect of a higher and more lucrative appointment. This was a terrible blow for poor Kate: she knew not what to do: but dispirited and desponding, she retraced her way to the hostelry.

She was not however a young woman likely to abandon herself to utter despair; and though seriously afflicted, she summoned all her energies to her aid, that no time should be lost in adopting some specific course. She sat down and wrote two letters,—one to Count Christoval at Barcelona, beseeching his advice—the other to the Marquis of Villebelle, which, at the landlady's suggestion, she addressed to the care of the Minister of Foreign Affairs at Paris, it being certain that to this functionary Villebelle's first visit would be paid on his arrival in the French capital; and as he was not likely to travel day and night without intermission, the letter would in all probability reach its destination before him.

On the following day Kate had the satisfaction of receiving a letter from Don Christoval at Barcelona,—written however before he could of course have received her's. It was to the effect that he had completely succeeded with the Captain-General in procuring a respite for Edward Russell until the result of her proceedings on her lover's behalf should be made known. Don Diego moreover informed Kate that the Captain-General was vested with sufficient authority to extend this respite for three weeks, which he had no doubt would be done; and therefore the Count expressed a hope that in the interval Miss Marshall would find her endeavours crowned with complete success. The intelligence thus conveyed in Count Christoval's

letter, was satisfactory even beyond her hopes, under present circumstances: for there was ample leisure in the meantime for the Marquis of Villebelle to interest himself in her lover's behalf. She felt assured that he would do so: and she awaited in confidence the arrival of letters from that nobleman in due course. But before any came, she received another communication from Don Diego Christoval, in answer to her own. It was to the effect that he himself possessed not the slightest interest with the Ministers then in power, their politics and his being at extreme variance: otherwise he would have before volunteered to exert himself in those quarters. He gave Kate to understand that if he were thus to take up her cause, such a step would only prejudice it and lead to a certain refusal. It was therefore useless for him to make the attempt: while on the other hand, it was of the highest consequence that he should remain at Barcelona in order to prevent the Captain-General from signing the warrant of execution until the full period of respite which he was enabled to grant, should have elapsed. The Count's letter, which was penned in a strain of true brotherly sympathy, concluded by encouraging such hope as he dared hold out, and proffering such condolence as it was proper for him to express.

A few days afterwards, Kate received letters from Paris. One was from the Marquis of Villebelle, couched in the kindest terms, and enclosing a note of the most urgent entreaty to the Minister of the Interior, beseeching that the boon which the bearer thereof might solicit should be granted. The other letter was from Constance, whom we suppose we must call the Marchioness of Villebelle;—and this was penned in the warmest and most affectionate strain,—assuring Kate that neither herself nor her husband would ever forget the services they had received at her hands when at Dover, and proffering the sincerest sympathy. This letter also contained an enclosure; it was addressed to the wife of the Minister of the Interior, beseeching this lady to espouse the cause of Miss Marshall and to use her influence with her husband to procure the grant of the boon which would be requested. Both these letters—we mean that of the Marquis to the Minister, and that of the Marchioness to the Minister's wife—were written in English; thus proving that those for whom they were intended, were conversant with that language,—and also serving to convince Kate (they being left unsealed for her perusal) that the cause which she had at heart was espoused in no lukewarm manner by the generous friends whose interest she had thus secured.

Miss Marshall arrayed herself in the handsomest garb she had brought with her from England; and indeed she looked uncommonly handsome. Her fine shape, rich in its modelled but well-adjusted proportions, was set off to the best advantage: while the flutter of hope and suspense sent up a carnation hue to her cheeks. When her toilet was completed, she repaired in a hired vehicle to the private residence of the Minister of the Interior,—this being about noon, and her kind-hearted landlady informing her that it was the best hour for waiting upon that functionary. On arriving at the Minister's house, Miss Marshall was conducted to a waiting-room, where some half-dozen other persons desirous to see the great man, were seated; and each of these was summoned in turn to the reception-apartment. At length Kate found herself alone in the waiting-room; and her heart palpitated with still more anxious flutterings than hitherto, as she said to herself that the next time the door opened, it would be to admit the usher who was to summon her into the presence of him who with a breath could restore her to perfect happiness or plunge her into the deepest abyss of woe. Half-an-hour elapsed while she thus remained alone; and it appeared to her the longest half-hour she had ever passed in her life. But at length the door opened—the usher made his appearance—she was conducted across a spacious landing—a door was thrown open—and she entered a large and splendidly furnished cabinet, where the Minister of the Interior was negligently lounging in a large arm-chair, and a secretary sat writing at a desk.

When a person is about to enter for the first time into the presence of a celebrated or highly-placed individual, the imagination invariably depicts to itself some portraiture as the ideal of such individual's appearance; and with the possessor of Ministerial functions, is generally associated the idea of at least a mature age, if not an advanced one. Thus was it that Kate Marshall had fancied she was about to behold an elderly or an old man, with gray hair—a calm and dignified expression of countenance—and sedate manners, accompanied with a certain degree of awe-inspiring reserve. The portraiture she had thus in imagination drawn, was not justified in any one single point by the actual reality. The Minister of the Interior was a young man, scarcely thirty years of age—with a profusion of raven black hair—a glossy moustache, and well curled whiskers. His features were regular—his countenance pale, with a slight tinge of sallowness: his eyes were dark and full of fire—while the somewhat bluish circles in which they appeared to be set, denoted either the wear and tear of close application to business, or else the workings of strong passions combined with habits of dissipation. He was of slight figure—short of stature, but well made. His looks had a certain vivid keenness: his glances were of penetrating sharpness, as if he sought to pierce through and through the soul of any one accosting him. He was dressed in deep black—but with a certain air of fashionable elegance not altogether devoid of pretension.

We may here as well observe that the Minister was one of those unscrupulous and ambitious political adventurers, who, taking advantage of the disturbed state of Spanish politics, and attaching themselves to the faction which was then dominant, had suddenly arisen from comparative obscurity into power and importance. Only a year had elapsed since the storm of insurrections, sweeping over Spain, had terminated in the abdication of the Regency by the liberal-minded and magnanimous Espartero: and the reign of military terrorism, established by Narvaez and the adherents of Queen Christina, was now rampant. Men of unscrupulous dispositions were required as the chief political agents of this revived despotism; and the present Minister of the Interior was one of these. He had been the editor of a journal noted for its violent animosity to Espartero: at the beginning of the insurrection he had done his

best to defame the character of that true-hearted patriot; and his services were rewarded by a portfolio in the Cabinet. But his induction into the Ministry was not merely a recompense for his past conduct: it had likewise been brought about by the want of such personages as himself to carry out the views of the new *regime*. Of all these circumstances Kate Marshall was ignorant,—she knowing but little of Spanish politics; and the landlady of the hotel, being too much accustomed to behold mere adventurers suddenly rising into high places, had not thought it worth while to give her English guest any detailed information upon the subject.

It is not the custom for persons seeking an interview with a Spanish Minister at his own private residence, to send in their cards, nor make any previous announcement of the object of their visit. Thus, until Kate Marshall entered that room, the high functionary whom we have described, had not the least notion who was about to appear before him. He was evidently struck with the handsome person of the English woman; and his dark eyes, having surveyed her from head to foot, settled upon her countenance, where the colour was coming and going in rapid transitions according as she was swayed by the varied emotions excited in her heart. She would much rather have found the Minister to be a personage corresponding with the portraiture which her imagination had drawn, than what she now found him to be: for there was something about him but little encouraging to one who had so important a boon to solicit. In a word, he seemed an individual who could be merciless and implacable if he chose; and poor Kate was for the first few instants tortured by her apprehensions. He did not at once address her; but with his eyes fixed upon her countenance, evidently waited for her to give an explanation of her business. With trembling hands she drew forth the letter which the Marquis of Villebelle had sent, addressed to the Minister; and as she presented it, her looks fell beneath the searching—almost burning and gloating gaze, which he rivetted upon her. Then his eyes settled upon the paper; and having perused it, he made a sign for the secretary to retire. The command was obeyed; and Kate was now alone with the Minister of the Interior.

"And you are Miss Marshall, I presume?" he said, speaking in very excellent English. "Be seated:"—and he indicated a chair close by his own, and nearly opposite,—so that by turning slightly round, he could still survey his fair applicant from head to foot, as she tremblingly took that seat. "The Marquis of Villebelle," he went on to observe, "has written very strongly on your behalf. Will you explain the nature of the boon you seek at my hands?"

"Your Excellency may perhaps be aware," responded Kate, speaking in tremulous accents, and still with looks bent down beneath the ardent gaze which was fixed upon her and filled her mind with a vague trouble,—"your Exellency is perhaps aware that an English sailor named Edward Russell——"

"Enough, Miss Marshall!" he gently interrupted: "I am acquainted with all the incidents:"—then, pointing to the desk at which his secretary had been writing, he added, "Amongst those papers, lie the documents connected with the case. I learn from his Excellency the Captain-General of Catalonia, that by virtue of the authority invested in him, he has temporarily suspended the execution of the sentence. Can you point out to me any substantial reasons wherefore a commutation of the sentence should be effected——or," added the Minister, more slowly, and as Kate thought, with a strange significancy of look, "a pardon should be granted? But first of all I should perhaps inquire wherefore you yourself are so interested in this man? The Marquis of Villebelle merely represents you as being thus deeply interested—but leaves all explanations to be given by yourself."

"Edward Russell is my affianced husband," answered Kate, the colour now mantling vividly upon her cheeks, down which tears were at the same time trickling.

"Ah! the romance of a love-affair!" ejaculated the Minister, with a smile: and as Miss Marshall raised her eyes at the moment, she thought that smile was somewhat encouraging.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed; "I have travelled from my native place in England, with the hope of saving a life which is dearer than my own! I have endured and suffered much—I have journeyed day and night—I have deemed no fatigue too great, no peril too menacing, to be encountered in the prosecution of my object! In the midst of a forest my life was within a hair's breadth of succumbing to the murderous designs of assassins——"

"Ah, I recollect?!" exclaimed the Minister. "The papers have been forwarded to me; and methought when I ere now read your name in the Marquis of Villebelle's letter, it was not altogether unfamiliar. Yes—I have perused those official documents, sent by the Alcalde of the town where the investigation took place; and from the depositions it is indeed but too clear that you experienced a very narrow escape. But you must love this Edward Russell very much that you have dared such fatigues and so many dangers on his behalf?"

"Oh! I have endured more than has come to your Excellency's knowledge," cried Kate, thus alluding to her arrest by the Catalan banditti: but instantaneously recollecting that this was an episode to which, for Count Christoval's sake, she ought not even to have glanced, she quickly added, "But no matter, sir! All that I have undergone, will be esteemed light indeed, if the result should prove favourable to my object. Oh, let me not implore your Excellency in vain!"

The young woman—full of acute suspense, and not knowing what to hope at the hands of this man who gazed upon her in a way that filled her heart with vague uneasiness—spoke in vehement and impassioned accents; while the tears continued to trace their crystal pathway down her cheeks. The Minister still surveyed her with an attention which might be merely replete with compassionate interest, but which nevertheless had a certain expression of libertine ardour; and this expression it was that caused the trouble which was racking the afflicted applicant.

"You are too intelligent, Miss Marshall," he said, "not to comprehend that this offender—to use no harsher term—has rendered himself ob-

noxious to the severest criminal laws of the country. I am aware it was argued in his defence that no life was taken by *his* special hand: but he was the leader of a party committing an unlawful act—and the weapons of his followers spilt the blood of Spanish subjects. Were he a Spaniard himself—were he possessed of high interest and influential connexions—I should still be unable to listen favourably to any appeal made on his behalf. What, then, can I say to you? With every disposition to attend to the strong and urgent recommendations of my friend the Marquis of Villebelle—with every disposition, too, to serve a young lady of your appearance—I am afraid——"

"No, sir—do not crush me with despair at once! Do not—do not, I entreat you!"—and Kate Marshall fell upon her knees before the Minister.

"Rise," he said, taking her hand: and as she obeyed him, he still continued to hold that hand in his own—while at the same instant an unmistakable expression of passionate desire glowed upon his features. "Perhaps," he went on to observe, "a means may be found——"

Kate understood him in a moment. It was no longer possible to doubt his meaning: it was conveyed in the significancy of his look—the pressure which she felt her hand was sustaining—his entire appearance. In short, that high public functionary had revealed himself as an unprincipled libertine, about to make an overture which was comprehended even before it was uttered. Kate snatched away her hand: the flush of indignation glowed upon her features; and she was turning away, when, suddenly smitten by the idea—it was a last faint hope—that she might possibly have misinterpreted his meaning and done him an injustice, she fixed her eyes steadily upon his countenance, saying, "Surely, sir—surely, you will not suffer me to depart with the conviction that there is no mercy in the soul of a Spanish statesman!"

"Sit down once more, Miss Marshall," responded the Minister, suddenly becoming cold and haughty: then, as she resumed her seat, he went on to observe, "I explained to you ere now, that even if the plea for mercy on behalf of this offender were backed by high family interest, I should not know how to concede the point. You yourself must comprehend the difficulty of obtaining such a concession. There are no grounds upon which a pardon can be accorded, or a commutation of the sentence be decreed. But if it would be difficult to yield to an interest really powerful, how can you expect me to give an affirmative answer to the intercession of a stranger? Should I not be seriously compromising myself? should I not be liable to the attacks of those ill-conditioned persons who are ever ready to hold up public men to scorn and hatred, to suit their own factious aims? In a word, should I not be running an immense risk by diverting the tide of justice from its course, in a case which presents not the least ground for such a proceeding on my part?"

"I am aware of all this, sir," responded Kate: "but, Oh! the satisfaction which your own heart will experience——"

She stopped short, as a half-scornful smile began wreathing the moustached lip of the Minister. Hope, which had again been rising—though faintly enough, it is true—in her bosom, sank down again, like the wing-wearied bird from some ineffectual soaring into a celestial region; and she felt that her heart was weeping tears of blood, at the same time that a fresh gush of the crystal tide poured forth from her eyes.

"Yes," the Minister resumed; "great indeed is the risk that I should run: and permit me to remind you, Miss Marshall, that the days of romance are over. We live in times of stern reality—in times when the actions of individuals are necessarily influenced by a certain degree of personal selfishness. The Marquis of Villebelle, were he now present, would himself assure you that the boon you solicit is one which no Minister would be likely to grant—save and except under circumstances of an extraordinary character. In a word, you ask a life. What if I grant it? Is there to be no recompense for me?"

"Yes, sir," responded Kate, now speaking with renewed firmness: "your reward will be found in the consciousness of having performed a deed which will raise up two of your fellow-creatures from the abyss of woe, to the height of exultant happiness. And in the warm gratitude of our hearts——"

"Oh, that universal word *gratitude!*" exclaimed the Minister scornfully: "it is uttered by every one who has a favour to ask. Young lady, do you not reflect that every criminal now in a Spanish gaol, might send a relative, a lover, or a friend, to demand of me a similar boon, and offer a similar reward,—the boon being a life which is implored—the recompense, gratitude! In good sooth I should thrive upon so much gratitude, were it of a substantial, a tangible, and a serviceable value. But it is nothing—a mere airy word—an empty name! Must I once more remind you that individual actions are now ruled by selfishness? You ask me a life: the favour you demand is immense—the greatest, the highest which it is in mortal's power to bestow. And in return, you offer a recompense the meanest, the poorest, the paltriest, the most contemptible!"

"Oh, sir!" murmured Kate, rising from her seat, and almost convulsed with affliction; "if the treasures of the whole world were at my disposal, I would lay them at your feet: but, alas! I have not wherewithal to give you such reward as may be commensurate with the boon that I implore."

"Gold?—who spoke of gold?" said the Minister, contemptuously. "I have enough. It was not to paltry dross that I for a moment alluded. Were you an old wrinkled hag, and if you were enabled to lay at my feet countless sums of the yellow metal, I should at once return an abrupt negative to your demand. But is there no reward which a young and beautiful woman can bestow?"

"Now, sir, I dare not for another moment seek to blind myself to the true nature of your meaning!" — and as Kate Marshall thus spoke, her whole appearance indicated the sudden uprising of womanly pride and dignity. "You wield great and almost sovereign power—you have authority of life and death: but your present conduct towards a friendless foreign woman who implores a boon at your hands, is not the finest chapter in your career. He whom I love must perhaps die—and my own heart will be broken:

but the time may come when your Excellency will look back with remorseful sorrow upon the incident of this day, and when perhaps you will regret that you have thus planted a dagger into a bosom already too deeply wounded."

Having thus spoken, Kate Marshall was moving towards the door, when the Minister exclaimed, "Stop! Perhaps *you* may yet think better of your own conduct—and *then* it will be too late. Remember that with one stroke of the pen I can give you the life which you demand: but also with a stroke of the pen, I can order it to be be taken away within the week that is passing!"

"But you will not do this deed of cruelty!" cried Kate, once again having recourse to intercession. "No—you will not do it! Ah, sir! you are a married man—you have a wife who doubtless loves you——"

"It is useless, young lady," interrupted the Minister, "for us to continue arguing thus. Understand well your own position—think not of mine. Your lover lies under sentence of death: with the least sacrifice on your part you can save him—a sacrifice, too, the secret of which need never be known to him——"

"Enough, sir!" ejaculated Kate Marshall, once more displaying all the prideful dignity of an injured, outraged woman: "I have already heard too much. Edward Russell must die——" She paused for a few moments, as the tide of unutterable feelings surged up into her throat, and the tears came to the very brims of her eyes: but with an almost preternatural effort she kept them back; and in a voice of unnatural calmness, went on to say, "Yes—he must die! for he would not consent to be saved at such a sacrifice as that which you have dared to suggest. Ah! you spoke of keeping the foul atrocity away from his ears? Think you that I could look him in the face without the tell-tale blush of shame revealing my dishonour? No: I am not the adept in dissimulation which your Excellency may be. And as for him whose life I am come to ask,—I repeat that he would scorn to accept it on such conditions: he would execrate *you*—he would loathe *me*—he would refuse to retain a life that had been purchased by so much villany on the one hand, and so much pollution on the other. Yes, sir—the contemned, the branded, the doomed smuggler has his own fine feelings, at least in one sense; and those feelings finer than you, who are a great Minister, can possibly boast of possessing! These feelings, sir, shall not be wounded nor outraged by me! Oh, in my eyes, infinitely superior is that contemned, branded, and doomed smuggler—though wearing the felon's chains in a dungeon-cell—infinitely superior is he, I say, than the great statesman who stands before me now, proposing in his dastard cowardice, and abhorrent meanness of soul, to make a human life the subject of barter for a woman's honour! I leave you, sir: I leave you to the enjoyment of such feelings as you may be enabled to experience after a scene such as this. I leave you for the purpose of writing to the Marquis of Villebelle, and informing that generous nobleman how his well-meant letter has been received, and the treatment it has procured me at your hands. But that is not *all*,—for wheresoever words may proclaim the infamy of your conduct, shall I make it known; and there is in my heart the conviction that the day must come when you will shrink appalled and in utter loathing from the contemplation of your villany."

The Minister of the Interior had listened coldly in one sense, but with impassioned feelings in another, to the long, the eloquent, and the reproachful address which Kate Marshall thus delivered. He listened coldly, we say, because he was unmoved and unaffected by the bitterness and terrible satire of her remarks: he was not even angered by them: the words, though barbed like arrows, fell innocuously away from a soul too much indurated by an utter unscrupulousness of character to be penetrated by them. But on the other hand the Minister was more than even excited by the beauty of Kate's appearance. Indeed, superbly handsome did the young woman seem then,—with the flush of indignation upon her cheeks—her blue eyes lighted up with fire—her nostrils dilating—her ivory teeth looking brilliant between the coral lines that were wreathed with the strong accentuation of her language—her fine bust swelling as if about to burst through the corsage which imprisoned it—her whole form appearing to expand into a nobler stature and more magnificent proportions, as she thus boldly stood, dealing forth the terrible invective of her outraged feelings. The Minister had likewise risen from his seat; and though his attitude seemed indicative of a cool *nonchalance*, yet there was a burning fire of lustful passion in his eyes—the hectic of that same gloating desire upon his cheeks—and the hot breath came thick and almost panting from his parched throat and between his quivering lips. Strange and striking was the contrast between those two beings,—the fine form of the Englishwoman expressing the prideful indignation of her sex—the short slender figure of the Minister seeming as if it might be overwhelmed by the immensity of that anger. And yet the one whose aspect was so glorious, was impotent for all such purpose: while the one whose presence was so insignificant, was endowed with the mightiest power.

"Stop yet one moment, Miss Marshall!" said the Minister, as she was turning away: "it is not the proposition which I am about to renew—but a piece of advice that I am about to give. Beware how you write to the Marquis of Villebelle aught that shall be derogatory to myself. Remember that I have the power of intercepting your correspondence at the Post-office, and of suppressing it if unpalatable to me. Beware likewise how, on going forth from this cabinet, you breathe a single word to my prejudice: for again I say, remember that I have powers whereof I should not fail to make use. And those powers I would exercise ruthlessly — mercilessly. Your chamber should be invaded by *gendarmes*: ignominiously should you be hurried through Spain in their custody—and turned adrift on the frontier of Portugal or of France. If therefore you have a friend, a confidant, or an adviser in the Spanish capital, see that you explain in guarded terms the particulars of this interview. Madrid is vast—its buildings are numerous—but there is not a wall which hath not ears to drink in whatsoever may be spoken to the disadvantage of those who occupy high places. Follow my counsel—and you will not be molested: disobey me in only a single tittle, and you shall be made to rue the conse-

quences. And now one word more! From a certain date the Captain-General of Catalonia had power to suspend your lover's sentence for three weeks:—of that period ten days have already expired! It would not be safe for you to suffer more than another week at the very outside to elapse ere you definitely resolve upon the course you will adopt. During this week, therefore, which is now to ensue, I shall at any instant be prepared to receive another visit from Miss Marshall. But if you come again——and you will come——let it be with the free knowledge that argument is useless, intercession vain, upbraiding a mere airy nothing. If you come, therefore, let it be with the firm resolution of adopting the only alternative that may save your lover's life."

During the delivery of this infamous speech, Kate Marshall's countenance expressed, as she listened, every variety of feeling which the several portions thereof were but too well calculated to excite. Pain the most mentally acute—indignation the most highly wrought—astonishment the most confounding—disgust the most ineffable—abhorrence the most intense,—all in their turn were these experienced by the young English woman. When the speech was over, she was about to turn away, and in silence take her departure: but she felt that she could not thus withdraw unavenged by the only weapons which she had to wield—namely, *words!*—and therefore she tarried a few moments longer to give expression to her sentiments.

"I had read and I had heard," she said, with flashing eyes and flushing cheeks, "that Spain is degenerate: but sunken indeed it must be below the uttermost extreme of my conception, when amongst its rulers it reckons such a man as thou! What? you would violate the sanctity of correspondence entrusted to the very means of conveyance which the Government itself monopolises, leaving none other open? You commit a hideous crime by proposing to barter a human life against a woman's honour; and yet if the injured one dares speak of your enormity, you threaten to treat her as if *she* were the culprit and *you* were the law's vindicator? And you tell me that you know I shall come back to you—and that when I do come, I must be prepared to surrender myself without another murmur to your arms? ——Oh, sir! is it possible that you could address me thus and not avert your looks in shame?"

Having thus spoken, Kate Marshall turned away from the Minister's presence, and issued forth from the cabinet. Had she paused another moment to observe his countenance, she would have seen that so far from being moved or affected by the way in which she had spoken, there was only a slight perceptible scoraful wreathing of his lip; and as the door closed behind her, he said to himself, as if in allusion to her prideful indignation, "Nevertheless, she will come back again."

And in the afternoon of that same day, the Minister of the Interior appeared in the Chamber of Deputies; and in an eloquent speech proposed a measure for giving an impulse to the moral and religious improvement of the people. And any one to have heard him dilate with all his oratorical power upon the necessity of encouraging lofty, refined, and honourable notions amongst the masses, would have thought that he himself must be deeply imbued with the sense of his high and important subject.

CHAPTER CXLV.

THE MINISTER'S WIFE.

Miss Marshall issued from the private dwelling of the Minister of the Interior with mingled feelings of anguish and indignation. Such was indeed her state of mind, she forgot she had about her the letter of the Marchioness de Villebelle, addressed to the Minister's wife. She entered the hired vehicle which had brought her thither, and was already half-way back to the hotel, when the circumstance of this letter flashed to her mind. Hope for a moment sprang up within her: but it vanished almost as quickly, as a second thought suggested that no wife, however excellent-hearted, could possibly wield any influence for good over such a husband as the man whom she had just left. She was almost inclined to abstain from delivering the letter altogether,—when she reflected that not a single stone should be left unturned that might, even by the remotest possibility, tend to the accomplishment of the aim which was dearer than her own life: and she resolved to present this letter.

Not choosing, however, to return to the Ministerial abode in the vehicle which might be recognised by the Minister himself from the windows—supposing that he had watched her departure,—and being also unable to make the driver understand that she wished to return thither, Kate stopped the chaise and alighted. She remembered the proper direction to be pursued; and after a quarter of an hour's walk, came once more in sight of the mansion. At that very instant she beheld the Minister issue forth and enter his carriage, which immediately rolled away: for he was now proceeding to the Chamber of Deputies. She was glad that he had thus left his house, at the time that she was about to seek an interview with his lady; and when the carriage was out of sight, she proceeded to the private entrance of the dwelling. Mentioning the name of the Minister's wife, she was at once conducted up a handsome staircase, into a large and elegantly furnished apartment,—where the domestic, perceiving she could not speak the Spanish tongue, politely motioned her to be seated. She waited in that room for nearly half-an-hour—at the expiration of which interval, the door opened and a lady made her appearance.

The Minister's wife was a remarkably fine woman, of about Kate's own age—namely, between four and five-and-twenty. She was tall, well made, and of similar proportions to those of Miss Marshall. Indeed, her contours were precisely of that same Hebe-richness adjusted to the most admirable symmetry, which characterized the Englishwoman. To be more particular still, a dress that was made for the one would have exactly fitted the other. But if in the height of stature and in the modelled forms of shape, there existed this similitude between the Minister's wife and Miss Marshall, the personal resemblance went no farther,—the former being of Spanish duskiness of complexion, with

raven hair and large dark eyes. Unlike the Spanish women generally, however, this lady wore her hair in a profusion of ringlets and tresses, which admirably became the perfectly oval shape of her countenance. She was handsome,—with regular features, bright red lips, and a superb set of teeth: while the rich carnation blood appeared on the cheeks beneath the diaphanous olive tint of the skin. Altogether she was a lady whose beauty might be termed brilliant; and she was as commanding and gracefully majestic, as her husband in stature and appearance was insignificant and sinister-looking. There was however upon her countenance a certain air of pensive melancholy, which seemed to denote that she was not altogether happy in her mind; and notwithstanding the affability of her manner, this spirit of thoughtfulness —almost amounting to mournfulness—displayed itself in a certain degree of languor. Kate was immediately prepossessed in her favour: for she felt convinced that the wife was very different from the husband.

"Pardon this intrusion, madam," she said, thus addressing in her native English the Spanish lady: "but I have been emboldened to wait upon you in order to present a letter from the Marchioness of Villebelle."

"Ah! my English friend, the Marchioness—that sweet amiable creature!" said the Minister's wife, a smile appearing at once upon her lips; as if she heard with unfeigned pleasure the name of one whose acquaintance she valued. "Pray be seated: for whosoever comes with a letter of introduction from either the Marquis or the Marchioness of Villebelle, must be truly welcome here."

Kate presented the letter: and in so doing she sighed audibly, through fear that the present proceeding would prove useless, as all the incidents of her interview with the Minister swept vividly through her memory. The lady's ear caught that sigh; and fixing her large dark eyes intently upon Miss Marshall, she said in a low murmuring voice, but still speaking in the English language, —"And you too are unhappy!"

Kate hastily averted her head to conceal her tears: and the Minister's wife, thinking that the letter would no doubt afford her some insight into the cause of that sorrow which her visitress but too evidently experienced, addressed herself to its perusal without saying another word.

"Miss Marshall," said the Spanish lady, when she had read the letter, "it is impossible for any one to appear before me more strongly recommended than yourself. To the extent of my limited power, you may command my services. Not merely on the ground of this recommendation will they be cheerfully afforded—but likewise because you belong to a nation for whom I entertain an esteem amounting to an affection. I was educated for some years in England, and received the kindest treatment from every one with whom I came in contact. Delay not therefore to give me such explanations as may enable me to tell you at once to what extent you may reckon on my influence."

Kate Marshall's tale was soon told: but in speaking of the interview which had so recently passed between herself and the lady's husband, she did not of course allude to the infamous proposal he had made her—but merely stated that his Excellency had declined to grant her request.

"Profoundly grieved am I, Miss Marshall, to enhance your affliction," said the lady, speaking in a voice indicative of the most compassionate sympathy: "for it would be wrong on my part to encourage a hope the realization of which I cannot foresee—much less promise. You cannot disguise from yourself—I am sure you are too intelligent to make such an attempt—that the case of the unfortunate man in whom you are so deeply interested, is no ordinary one?"

"I know it—alas, I know it but too well, lady!" responded Kate, with profound mournfulness. "Indeed, I have been made to understand that it is so. But surely, surely, there is mercy to be shown even to one who has so grievously offended against the laws of your country as he?"

"Did my husband hold out no hope?" inquired the lady: "none?—not the slightest whatsoever?"

"None, madam," answered Kate: but as she thus spoke, the colour mounted to her cheeks an instant before so pale; and if her own life had depended on it, she could not have prevented herself from looking troubled and confused — this trouble and this confusion, too, being enhanced when she perceived that the Minister's wife was now gazing upon her with a peculiar manner of penetration.

"And his Excellency held out no hope?" said the lady, slowly emphasizing her words, and looking with keen earnestness at Kate, as if she did not altogether believe the response that had been given, and bade her tax her memory for something that lurked in the background.

"Madam, I entertain no hope at the hands of your husband," replied Miss Marshall: then feeling that her confusion and her trouble were augmenting, and consequently becoming all the more visible, she burst into tears,—exclaiming passionately, "All my hope is now centred in yourself and in heaven!"

The Minister's wife rose from her seat, with a certain expression of countenance that appeared to be almost anguished; and she turned abruptly aside: then, as suddenly accosting Kate again, she said in a low voice, "Miss Marshall you have not told me *all!* I understand it!—I comprehend the noble delicacy of your conduct — and I thank you!"

And this voice in which the Spanish lady spoke, was not merely low—it was likewise so altered from its natural tones that Kate was smitten with dismay; and gazing up into the countenance that was bent over her, as she herself retained her own seat, she saw that it was deadly pale—with that pallor, too, which is always the more ghastly and the more fearful when displayed by the face of a brunette. The idea naturally flashed all in a moment to Kate's mind, that the lady must be sufficiently aware of her husband's true character,—possibly acquainted, also, with a sufficiency of his antecedents,—to enable her to make the painful surmise of what had actually taken place. Her own uneasiness was therefore wrought up to the highest: her confusion was enhanced into bewilderment. She knew not what to say: her own position was most painful. If questioned pointedly, how could she deny what had taken place?—but on the other hand, how could she admit it? To

distress this kind-hearted lady who in the space of a few minutes had shown her so much sympathy, was an alternative to which she could not easily bring herself; and yet, as she still gazed on that fearfully pale countenance, and looked into those dark eyes where an unnatural light seemed burning,—she felt convinced that the injured and outraged wife had indeed but too well conjectured what had passed at the interview between herself and the Minister.

"Miss Marshall," said the lady, resuming her seat, and making an evidently powerful endeavour to subdue her emotions, "you have not told me all: but I again thank you for having suppressed that which you have left unexplained. Ah! it was not without reason I involuntarily observed just now *that you too are unhappy*,—meaning thereby that in such unhappiness there was perhaps too much cause for the existence of sympathy between us."

"Lady," answered Kate, in a voice deeply compassionating this avowal of affliction on the part of the Minister's wife,—"if for a moment my presence beneath this roof should have led to aught that has given you pain, most sincerely and deeply do I regret it. You have shown me so much kind sympathy—and sympathy to one in my position is so sweet—that not for worlds could I find it in my heart to be the source of annoyance. Let me go, madam!—I will take elsewhere the burden of my own sorrows——"

"Miss Marshall," interrupted the Minister's wife, "there is something savouring of reproachfulness in your tone, your look, and your manner. Ah! if a doubt had previously remained in my mind, it would now be cleared up. Yes it is indeed so! There is confirmation of my painful conjecture in every syllable you have uttered—in every glance you have flung upon me. Oh!" she cried, wringing her hands bitterly—but still she did

not weep,—"what must you think of a man who wields so much power to do good, and yet uses it so unworthily? Oh, what must you think, I say?—what must you think? Alas that I should have been compelled to speak thus openly and plainly in your presence: but I see how it has been. *You* too have experienced an outrageous proposal from that man whose conduct fills me with shame, as it causes my unhappiness,—that man nevertheless whom I love so devotedly and so well! Oh, if my dear friend Constance"—thus alluding to the Marchioness of Villebelle—"knew that I am unhappy, and suspected the cause——But no!" she interrupted herself vehemently: "heaven forbid that it should be suspected at all——heaven in mercy forbid!"

The unfortunate lady became convulsed with grief—or rather desisted from her impassioned outpourings through the augmenting paroxysms of that rending anguish; and Kate Marshall, forgetting whatsoever difference of rank there might be between them, took both her hands—pressed them warmly in her own—and besought her to be comforted. The gush of mental agonies was too violent to last long; and when its sweeping fury had passed away—or at least had yielded somewhat to a lull—the Minister's wife unceasingly acknowledged the display of Miss Marshall's sympathy; and after a brief pause went on speaking.

"Circumstances," she said, "have led me into revelations to your ears which have never been breathed even to my mother or father—much less to friends or acquaintances. No: the pride of a woman has prevented *that*,—the pride of a Castilian too! Were I ill-looking, unaccomplished, and coarse in manners, I might complain of a husband's neglect—because, in *that* case, I should not be sustained by a proper pride above the meanness of complaining. It is however different. My glass tells me that I am not ugly: a retrospect over the educational training through which I have passed, convinces me that I cannot altogether be devoid of mental attractions; and the adulation which I receive in society, forbids the notion that my manners are repulsive. Therefore have I the conviction that I am a woman to be loved: and for the same reason my pride prevents me from suffering the world to know that I have not the power of fascinating my husband's heart. But I will tell you more, Miss Marshall. When four years ago I first formed his acquaintance, he was a poor, unknown, struggling advocate at the bar. We were married—and the dower which I brought him, though small, was nevertheless the foundation of his fortune. Therewith he established the journal which became such a power amongst the press—a power too amongst the people. It procured him a seat in the Chamber of Deputies; and thence the transition was by no means difficult to the elevated post of a Minister. To me he owes everything: my recompense is—nothing! worse than nothing—it is neglect! For three years has our married life lasted: for two years we have occupied separate chambers;—yes, for two years we have been only as friends dwelling beneath the same roof. There has been as much alienation between us—or rather on *his* part towards me—as if no nuptial vows had ever been pronounced. It may seem singular to you, Miss Marshall, that within the first hour of our acquaintance, I tell you all this: but it is because circumstances have led me into the revelation——And besides," added the Minister's wife, suddenly looking as if she were ashamed and confused, "there is a project in my mind which may serve the purposes of us both."

"Serve mine?" ejaculated Kate, eagerly catching, like a drowning creature, at any straw. "Do you mean that there is hope of saving the life of him I love?"

"Hope? Yes—every hope!" responded the lady. "But only if you will be guided by me."

"Guided by you?" exclaimed Miss Marshall: "you are an angel sent to raise me up from despair! Oh, you have but to speak—to give me your instructions—to tell me what to do—and I will follow your counsel in all things!"

"Patience for a moment," said the lady; "and let me first understand you beyond the possibility of mistake. Deal frankly with me: think not of wounding my feelings by any painful disclosures: it is absolutely necessary that I should learn everything which passed between my husband and yourself."

"Do you indeed insist upon such full and complete revelations?" asked Kate.

"I do," responded the Minister's wife. "Again I say, tell me everything! The success of the project which I have in my mind, depends upon the accuracy with which you give me these details. Alas! did you not perceive that I only conjectured them but too well almost from the beginning? You are not the first, Miss Marshall, to whom my husband has made such proposals: you are not the first to whom he has offered to sell that mercy which on no other condition would he vouchsafe! But you are one of the few who have had the honour, the spirit, and the rectitude to scorn and disdain the proposition. Oh! you know not how I love my husband, notwithstanding all his faults: and if I could but wean him back to my arms——But I am wasting time. Pray give me your explanations."

Kate Marshall,—perceiving that the Minister's wife was firmly resolute in hearing these disclosures, and that they connected themselves with the plan she was revolving in her mind,—no longer hesitated to acquiesce in her demand. She accordingly entered upon a narrative of those particulars of her interview with the Minister which are already known to the reader: but inasmuch as she appeared disposed to glance at them more lightly than was consistent with minuteness of detail, in order to avoid as much as possible shocking the outraged wife,—the latter was compelled to question her closely to elicit the fullest particulars. Ultimately every tittle was revealed,—not even to the omission of the insolent prophecy thrown out by the Minister, to the effect that within the week which was passing Kate would return to him.

"Now I know all," said the Minister's wife, in a mournful voice: for she could not be otherwise than shocked at the cold-blooded cruelty and refined villany of her husband's conduct: but speedily brightening up again, with the hope which was encouraged by the project then in her mind, she said, "Now, Miss Marshall, I will explain to you the course which is to be followed——the only course whereby you can save your lover from an otherwise certain death!"

The Minister's wife and Kate Marshall remained together for nearly an hour longer in deep and earnest discourse: but what the nature of it was, need not now be particularised. Suffice it to say, that Kate took her departure with hope in her bosom; and on returning to the hotel, she gave the landlady to understand that she had experienced no unfavourable reception at the hands of the Minister of the Interior and his wife—but that a definite answer could not be given to her prayer for three or four days to come.

CHAPTER CXLVI.

THE APPOINTMENT.

It was on the fourth morning after the interviews with the Minister and his wife,—and consequently verging towards the end of the week, within the limit of which it was so vitally necessary to adopt a decisive measure on behalf of Ned Russell,—that Kate Marshall again apparelled herself in her handsomest costume. She expended a considerable time over her toilet,—paying the minutest attention to every detail, and studying to render herself as attractive as possible. No doubt she felt that there was something meretricious in all this: but the image of her beloved was uppermost in her mind,—she was doing it for his sake—and this was her consolation. Her heart too beat high with hope; and this inward excitement gave a rich carnation bloom to her countenance. Never had Kate Marshall appeared to greater advantage: never had her handsome countenance looked handsomer—never were the rich contours of her shape more admirably displayed by the aids of apparel.

It was bordering upon noon, when, having finished this careful toilet, Miss Marshall entered a hired vehicle, and was driven to the private dwelling of the Minister of the Interior. This house, as already intimated—and like many of the mansions at Madrid—had two entrances. One was considered the private means of access to the family compartment: the other communicated with the official rooms of the Minister himself: for we should have observed that although he transacted his principal business at the Ministry of the Interior, he nevertheless received, at a certain hour, applicants and visitors at his own private residence. Perhaps he had more motives than one in adopting this course: it might be that there were certain matters which he could conduct with greater privacy at his own abode than at the building officially devoted to the department over which he presided.

It was at the entrance to the Minister's apartments that the vehicle which bore Kate, stopped to set her down, as on the preceding occasion. She was conducted up to the waiting-room: several other persons were there assembled;—but almost immediately after her arrival, she was desired by the usher to follow him into the Minister's presence. It was evident therefore that this usher had received his instructions how to act in case Miss Marshall should call again. The colour was heightened upon her cheeks as she followed the official into the same cabinet where she had before seen the Minister of the Interior; and on entering that apartment, she observed that he was now alone,—the secretary having been doubtless ordered to withdraw. The Minister endeavoured to maintain a cold reserve of manner,—as if he did not choose to show too much pleasure at the fulfilment of his prophecy. At the re-appearance of Miss Marshall, nevertheless, the gradual flushing of his previously pale cheeks, and the fiercer burning of his dark eyes, denoted but too plainly the flaming-up of the devouring desires which her presence had on the former occasion excited within him. Bowing with a distant courtesy, he motioned Kate to a seat—and resumed his own, from which he had risen on her entrance.

"Your prophecy is fulfilled, sir," said Kate, speaking in a low but firm voice. "I am here once more."

"But have you been mindful of the warning I gave?" demanded the Minister, his eyes travelling slowly and with gloating eagerness over her entire form: "have you borne in mind the assurances I so emphatically held out, that it would be useless to have recourse anew to intercession and entreaty—to threat or upbraiding?"

"I have borne all this in mind," answered Kate, her looks sinking beneath the devouring gaze of the libertine Minister.

"Then I am to understand, Miss Marshall," he went on to say, "that you have consented to my proposition?"

"I am resolved to save at any price the life of him whom I love:"—and still Kate spoke in a low but firm tone.

"It is well—and your decision is a wise one," said the Minister, every feature of his countenance being expressive of the inward exultation that filled his heart. "Doubtless you reflected that the period of delay is drawing to a close—and that to-morrow,—or the day after to-morrow *at latest*, the order for your lover's pardon should be transmitted to the Captain-General of Catalonia?"

"Such has been my reflection," rejoined Kate: "and to ensure the transmission of that pardon, have I returned to fulfil your prophecy."

"Then listen!" said the Minister, as he now approached Kate; and taking her hand, he bent towards her—so that his breath, hot with the fever of desire, played upon her cheek. "This night, as the clocks proclaim the hour of ten, must you be with me. No one need mark your arrival: no one shall be nigh to observe your approach. I will give you the key of that door at the entrance—— In short, everything shall be managed with a becoming delicacy."

"I expect as much at your hands, sir," answered Kate: "for heaven knows that if the shame and dishonour which I am this night to encounter, became whispered abroad in the world, it would drive me to despair and to self-destruction!"

"Fear nothing!" quickly answered the Minister, who was almost maddened by that close survey of Kate's countenance,—a survey which showed him that she was still in all the freshness of her charms—that no artificial colour lent the hue of the rose to her cheeks: while at the same time he could drink in the breath that was pure and balmy as the gentle breeze of a Spring morning. "Fear nothing," he repeated. "You have but to hint at any other arrangements—and they shall be adopted.

All that I require is the faithful keeping of the appointment: I care not for the circumstances under which it may be kept, so long as you will be mine!"

"Can you not understand," asked Kate, averting her blushing countenance, "that henceforth I can never look you in the face again?——Already am I overcome with shame and confusion——"

"And wherefore, beloved one?" asked the Minister: and he endeavoured to imprint a kiss upon one of those glowing cheeks: but she quickly repulsed him, starting up from her seat at the same time.

"No! no!" she cried: "not now! not now! Have I not assured you that I am already overcome with shame? Spare me, I beseech you!"

"I will," he answered: "because to-night you will be mine—altogether mine! But you will not come cold and inanimate—coy and reluctant—to my arms? It must not be a marble statue that I am to enfold in my embrace. No: you must come glowing with passion and with ardour——"

"Speak not thus—speak not thus!" interrupted Kate, trembling—perhaps shuddering from head to foot. "Oh, there is something shocking in the idea of talking thus in the broad daylight, when the sun is shining! But to-night—when darkness shall be upon the face of the earth—and when in the midst of darkness also I shall meet you,——*then* it may be different! *then*, perhaps, the plunge being resolved upon, I shall more than resign myself to my fate——"

"Oh, I understand you—I understand you!" exclaimed the libidinous Minister, literally trembling with the ardour of his passion. "You will be all that I require? But what meant you by those words you have just spoken—*that in the midst of darkness we shall meet?*"

"I mean this," answered Kate, still speaking with averted looks, and with a countenance crimsoned up to the very hair of her head: "that inasmuch as I never again can look you in the face without dying of shame—and inasmuch as you have promised that whatsoever arrangement may be suggested to spare my feelings, shall be carried out—I have to stipulate that the only condition on which I will come, is to the effect that we *do* meet in darkness; and that for the hour which I shall remain with you, your Excellency swears as a man of honour—by everything sacred in heaven, and in fear of everything terrible in Satan's kingdom—that you will not attempt to kindle lamp nor candle for the purpose of looking me in the face."

"No, no: I will not do it!" answered the Minister. "I will obey your behest in all things."

"You swear?" demanded Kate.

"I swear," responded the Minister.

"You swear," she repeated, "as solemnly and as fearfully as I ere now indicated?"

"I swear by all my hopes of hereafter!" was the rejoinder vehemently given.

"And understand me well," continued Kate, still speaking with averted looks—and still too with cheeks of peony-redness,—"there is something still more coercive than an oath——"

"What mean you?" demanded the Spaniard hastily.

"I mean this," was the quick reply: "that if you attempt to violate that oath which you have sworn, a dagger which I shall have with me——"

"A dagger?" ejaculated the Minister, who was in his soul a coward.

"Yes—a dagger!" responded Kate. "But not to drink your heart's blood! I am no murderess——no, not even to avenge such an outrage as that would be! But inasmuch as, if after having surrendered my honour up to you, it would be a shame goading me to madness to look you in the face—and as death would be preferable to such shame,—that dagger which is to accompany me, shall be plunged deep down into my own bosom if you were to attempt to violate your oath. *Then* your Excellency would have to account to the world as best you could, for the tragedy thus occurring in the privacy of your own chamber."

"Fear not, beauteous creature," responded the Minister, "that there will be need for such a frightful catastrophe. No, no: my imagination will depict the loveliness of your countenance, as it is already impressed upon my memory. Be it therefore as you say: we will meet in the darkness—we will continue in darkness—we will part in darkness likewise."

"And the decree of pardon," added Kate, "will be already drawn up—your signature will be attached thereto? You will have the document in readiness for me this night?"

"Fear not! all shall be done as you wish," replied the Spaniard.

"And now, one word more!" continued Kate: "for all this has a business-like regularity that must not be lost sight of. Your Excellency perceives that I trust entirely to your honour in faithfully placing in my hands the pardon for which I am to make so great a sacrifice. There is in our English history a terrible tale, of a certain Colonel Kirke, who obtained possession of a young damsel's virtue under circumstances somewhat similar to those which are taking place now,—with this difference, however, that it was the girl's brother, and not her lover, for whom she sacrificed herself to that pitiless soldier-judge. It is however recorded that Kirke—a vile traitor to his pledge, and inspired with the cruelty of a fiend—opened his casement in the morning, and showed the dishonoured sister the corpse of her brother suspended to a tree at a little distance. Now, your Excellency must understand me well——"

"What! do you believe me capable of such diabolic perfidy as that?" ejaculated the Minister.

"I have a right to guard against it," responded Kate, calmly and firmly. "Give me now a written acknowledgment signed by your own hand—sealed with your own seal,—an acknowledgment which I shall bear away with me,—that on certain conditions to be fulfilled to-night, the full and complete pardon of Edward Russell is to be placed in my possession. To-morrow I will remit you, by messenger or post, the acknowledgment you are about to sign."

"Ah! but you will use it to wreak a vengeance upon me?" cried the Minister, almost astounded at the demand.

"Think you that if I gain my end—namely, the salvation of my lover," asked Kate,—"I shall be willing to take a step which by giving publicity to the whole dread and infamous trans-

action, would make known my shame to the world? No, sir: I should be but too anxious for the secret to be religiously kept. But if, on the other hand, you deceive me in respect to the pardon—*then* should I scatter all other considerations to the wind; and the idea of vengeance becoming paramount, I should proclaim all my wrongs—because when once that vengeance had been wreaked, I myself should have no longer a single tie to bind me to existence. I should perish—and in self-destruction throw off the coil of shame!"

The Minister of the Interior perceived nothing unreasonable in all this: on the contrary, he merely beheld therein the natural precaution which a woman was likely to take when having to deal with a person of unscrupulous character. For his Excellency knew full well that such *was* his character—and that in such a light it must be viewed by Miss Marshall. But on this score he was altogether indifferent; he considered himself to have risen by his own talents and intrigues high above the opinion of the world at large—and consequently to place him in total independence of the opinion of an individual. He was infatuated with Miss Marshall's beauty:—possessed of the strongest passions, he was excited to a more than ordinary degree by her handsome countenance and her fine shape: he longed to clasp her in his arms—yearned with avidity to make her his own. Therefore it was without any farther hesitation that he yielded to what he regarded as a mere precaution on her part; and seating himself at the desk, he penned in the English language precisely such a document as she had suggested,—appending his signature, and affixing the ministerial seal of the Home Department.

"One single embrace ere you leave me, Miss Marshall!" he said, as he presented the paper; and he made a movement to suit the action to the word.

"No, sir—not now!" she emphatically exclaimed, retreating a couple of paces. "I am no brazen-face that can thus calmly and deliberately surrender myself to the arms of a stranger. Understand me well, sir!" she continued, again with averted countenance, and with that crimsoning of the cheeks which showed how revolting it was unto the sensitive delicacy of her feelings to be compelled thus to argue and expatiate upon such a subject: "understand me well, sir! I am pure and chaste: it is no meretricious female whom you are thus wooing by coercion instead of by sentiment; and again do I repeat that in the broad daylight, with the sun shining, I cannot look you in the face and think of all that is to be consummated. This night, punctually as the clocks at Madrid proclaim the hour of ten, shall I keep the appointment which has been made."

With these words Kate Marshall, having secured the document in her bosom, moved towards the door; and the Minister of the Interior sought not to detain her—sought not even so much as to touch her hand again. That door closed behind her; and when he was once more alone, he gloated over the idea that within a few hours thence, the superb creature who had just quitted his presence, would be his own—abandoned completely unto him—clasped in his arms!

Kate returned to the hotel; and in the course of the afternoon, a lady—wearing the graceful Spanish mantilla, which completely concealed her countenance—called upon her at that hostelry. They were closeted together for nearly an hour; and then the visitress took her leave,—departing on foot as she had come, and with the mantilla completely hiding her features, so that she could not possibly be recognised by any one belonging to the establishment. This lady was the wife of the Minister of the Interior: but wherefore had she thus stealthily sought an interview with Kate? This question will be speedily answered by the incidents which we are about to record.

The hours passed—evening came—the dusk set in—and at length the iron tongue of Time proclaimed the moment of the appointment which Miss Marshall had consented to keep with the Minister of the Interior. This functionary had given an intimation to his domestics that they were to be out of the way so far as his own private suite of apartments was concerned; and they, comprehending full well that their master had in hand one of his wonted affairs of gallantry, took the hint and were careful to obey it. Faithful to his promise to Kate Marshall, he extinguished the lights in the vestibule—on the staircase—in the spacious landing to which that staircase led,—everywhere, in short, from the entrance-door to that of his own chamber—and within the chamber itself likewise. He was apparelled in a dressing-gown—his feet were thrust into slippers: his heart was beating with the excitement of his passions—for his fervid imagination was enabled to define and delineate all the contours of that shape which the dress of his intended victim had concealed, although to a certain extent developing them. He thought to himself that the moment was now at hand which was to give him one of those rewards for which he had laboured, and toiled, and intrigued: inasmuch as he regarded the possession of power, not merely as a crowning triumph of his ambition, but likewise as the means of gratifying his insatiate lust for pleasure.

It was, as we have said, ten o'clock—and already for at least five minutes had the licentious Minister been waiting in the vestibule,—waiting there in the darkness for the arrival of her whom he expected. Nor was he kept long in suspense. The bell at the entrance rang: he flew to open the door—and a female form, closely veiled, passed into the vestibule.

"Beauteous creature, I thank thee," exclaimed the impassioned Minister, "for thus punctually keeping the appointment of love!"—and now feeling that he had a right to consider her his own, shrouded in the darkness as they were, and all arrangements being made by him in faithful compliance with Kate Marshall's stipulations,—he tore up the veil, and straining her in his arms, pressed his lips to her's. "Now," he said, "let me lead you hence."

She had spoken not a word: she appeared to have surrendered herself like a willing victim to his embrace. She accompanied him up the stairs: the landing was crossed—the chamber was entered.

For obvious reasons we must pass with some degree of haste over this scene. Suffice it to say that half-an-hour had elapsed from the moment that the Minister of the Interior had conducted

to admit—that I stand upon the very verge of ruin. Ah, cursed folly that has brought me to this extremity!"

"My dearest husband," said the noble-hearted Spanish woman, seizing his hands and pressing them to her bosom, "tell me what I can do to serve you."

"I am about to ask you much," quickly responded the Minister: but then, as a sudden thought struck him, he exclaimed, "Oh! you must know what Miss Marshall has done with that document? She acted under your advice——"

"Think you," interrupted the lady with a reproachful look, "that I should have left you thus in suspense, had I really known how she has disposed of the paper? No—on my soul, I am ignorant on the subject! I saw her this afternoon; and she acquainted me with all that had taken place between herself and you in the morning: she even showed me that paper—but I neither counselled her to make any special use of it, nor did she intimate that such was her intention. So far from myself having the knowledge that she thought of parting with it, it was a portion of my plan to obtain it from her on the morrow, when placing the pardon in her hands; and I should have come, as I ere now said, to throw myself at your feet—to reveal everything—and to restore to you this very written promise whereof we are speaking."

The lady spoke with such a voice and with such looks of completest sincerity, that it was impossible for her husband to doubt the truth of her averments.

"I believe you," he said: "what right indeed have I to doubt you—you who are exhibiting a kindness and an affection towards me which I so little deserve!"

"And the service I can render you?" asked the wife anxiously. "Methinks I can anticipate what you would say."

"At an early hour in the morning," responded the Minister, "you must repair——"

"This night!—now, if you will!" exclaimed the lady. "I know what you mean: you would have me visit Miss Marshall in her prison——But, Ah! my dear husband, you have still the power to make some atonement—and rest assured you will not be a loser thereby! Sign the order for this young woman's release: let me be the bearer of it to the gaol—and I stake my existence upon the promise I now make,—which is, that I will save you if it be yet possible to recall whatsoever course Miss Marshall may have taken!"

It was still more impossible than at first for the Minister to remain insensible to the generous conduct of his wife. That heart which for nearly two years had remained so hardened against her, was melted. He would have been the vilest, the most detestable, and the most brutal of wretches were it otherwise: but unprincipled though he were, he was not so bad as all this. He seised his wife's hand—he carried it to his lips—and as she wound her arms about his neck, he clasped her to his breast.

"Admirable woman!" he exclaimed, "you have taught me a lesson this night which I cannot possibly forget! Whatsoever may be the result of these threatening circumstances, I shall not remain unmindful of your noble generosity. No—I shall not! Wicked and unscrupulous I have been! Not for an instant do I attempt to palliate my conduct: but I may atone for it—yes, I may atone for it; and that atonement shall be made. I will now follow your advice in all things. You say that you will proceed this night——"

"To the prison?" exclaimed the lady. "Yes—at once! Lose not a moment in writing an order for the discharge of Miss Marshall: within an hour or two she may be back at the hotel—and the circumstance need not obtain publicity."

While thus speaking, the Minister's wife had begun to re-apparel herself hastily; and he, taking writing materials which were in the room, sat down and penned the document wherewith she had enjoined him to entrust her.

"But is not Miss Marshall herself," he suddenly asked, "playing you false——I mean by the disposal of that written promise without your knowledge——"

"Let us not judge her hastily," interrupted the lady. "She may have secured it in some place where it has escaped the notice of the searchers. This is indeed most probable: for brief as my acquaintance has been with her, I have nevertheless obtained a sufficient insight into her disposition to feel assured that she would do naught to injure you, the effects of which should redound upon myself. I am now about to issue forth: I will repair to the prison——But you empower me to promise Miss Marshall that her lover's pardon shall be forwarded to her in the morning?"

"The matter is in your hands," answered the Minister: "use your own discretion—adopt the course which may appear best. Fear not that I shall repudiate your actions!"

He again embraced his wife; and drawing her veil closely over her countenance, the magnanimous lady issued forth into the streets of Madrid.

CHAPTER CXLVII.

THE GAOL.

It was soon after eleven o'clock on the eventful night of which we are speaking, that Kate Marshall's chamber at the hotel was suddenly invaded by the Minister's valet, followed by three officers of the Secret Police in plain clothes. Kate had not retired to rest: nor indeed had she even begun to disapparel herself. Her mind was too much agitated with suspense as to the issue of the stratagem, to permit her to seek her pillow. She was therefore sitting up,—endeavouring to concentrate her attention upon one of the books which she had brought with her from Dover: but she constantly lost the thread of what she attempted to read; and found her thoughts wandering to far different subjects. Although in respect to the written promise received from the Minister of the Interior, she had adopted a particular course—yet she could not satisfy herself that even this precaution would guard against the effects of his anger or the insidiousness of his treachery, should he discover that instead of the victim whom he expected, it was his own wife whom he was clasping in his arms. Thus, when the chamber was abruptly invaded by the valet and the policemen, Kate comprehended but too

well that the stratagem was detected; and she was naturally smitten with the fear that all was lost. No—not quite *all*: for still there was the chance that some good might result from the manner in which she had disposed of the acknowledgment; and this idea was faintly—but only faintly—cheering for Miss Marshall.

The reader has seen enough of her to be aware that she was by no means deficient in courage; and though the shock produced by the sudden entry of those four men at this time of the night, was naturally great, she speedily recovered her presence of mind. She was however subjected to the grossest and most indelicate treatment on the part of the ruffians who now held her captive. They insisted upon searching with their own hands the pockets of her garments; and while two of the officers forcibly held her arms, the valet actually plunged his hand into her bosom, to ascertain if she had any papers concealed there. Crimson with indignation, and her eyes flashing fire, Kate Marshall with an almost preternatural effort disengaged herself from the gripe of those ruffians; and snatching up one of the candlesticks, hurled it with such force at the insolent valet, that if it had struck him on the head, he never would perhaps have had another chance of practising such dastard conduct in this world: but he stepped nimbly aside, and it fell at the farther extremity of the room. Her trunk was then minutely searched—her garments were tossed out upon the floor: the inspection was most minute—but all that the ruffians could discover, consisted of a few of Ned Russell's letters which he had written to her at different times, and which she had brought with her for re-perusal:—because what young woman who loves, is ever unaccompanied by the tender epistles of him to whom her heart is devoted? The search was extended to the bed in the chamber—to the drawers—indeed to every nook where anything might be concealed: but nothing more was discovered, beyond the letters referred to. These were duly sealed up, and taken possession of by the valet, in accordance with the positive instructions he had received from his master.

While the search was being prosecuted, Kate Marshall stood looking on with indignation still depicted upon her countenance: but she spoke not a word—because she was unable to make herself understood by the Spaniards; and even if it were otherwise, she was too full of wrathful pride and a sense of outraged modesty to deign even a syllable of remonstrance or rebuke in respect to such brutal ruffians. When the search was over, they made her a sign to put on her bonnet and shawl; and this being done, she was hurried down stairs to a vehicle waiting at the entrance of the hotel. She encountered not a soul belonging to the establishment;—not even the kind-hearted landlady was nigh to bestow upon her a look of compassion: and therefore Kate full well understood that the seclusion of the inmates of the hotel in their own chambers, while all these things were taking place, must be in pursuance of a strict mandate issued by the police officials to that effect. She likewise comprehended that she was being borne to gaol: for whither else could she be thus dragged away at that time of the night?

And it was so. In a quarter of an hour the vehicle reached the gate of the gloomy prison; and when the officials thereof were summoned, the valet gave whispered instructions relative to the consignment of Miss Marshall to a solitary cell. In a few minutes she was alone in that dungeon: for all the appearance of a dungeon had it, though not underground. It was a small chamber, surrounded with walls of massive masonry but too well calculated to beat back any cries of anguish which might issue from the lips of a captive imprisoned there. There was no window in those walls; and the air was only admitted by a narrow grating in the huge door. An iron bedstead, with mean and sordid bedding—a table—a chair—a basin and ewer, these constituted the furniture of the place. The turnkey, who conducted Miss Marshall thither, took away the light,—locking and bolting the door behind him; and thus was she left in the depth of darkness and to the companionship of her own sad thoughts.

Still her presence of mind did not forsake her. Arbitrary as was the treatment to which she thus found herself subjected, yet she knew full well that even in a country where such things could be done, this same tyrannous power might not be stretched to such a length as to take her life secretly—nor publicly without some form of trial. She likewise reflected that the wife of the Minister of the Interior would most probably seek some means of befriending her; and she moreover knew that the course she had adopted in respect to the Minister's written undertaking, would be certain to lead to inquiries concerning her. Thus, altogether she was not without some slight consolation: but still she deeply felt the cruel treatment she was experiencing—while upon her cheeks still burnt the glow of indignation on account of the brutality of the Minister's valet.

For more than an hour she remained seated in the chair, giving way to her thoughts;—and then, without taking off her apparel, she lay down upon the bed. Sleep did not visit her eyes,—nor did she even woo it: she had no inclination for slumber. Nearly another hour passed: and it was verging towards two in the morning, when she heard footsteps advancing along the stone corridor leading to her cell. A light streamed through the grating in the door—the key turned in the lock—and the bolts were withdrawn. Suddenly a wild terror seized upon Kate Marshall. What if the unscrupulous and remorseless Minister had caused her to be brought thither that he might by force accomplish his detestable purpose? what if the hireling creatures belonging to that gaol, would wink at the atrocities committed by one so highly placed and who wielded such power either to reward or to punish? Kate started up from the wretched pallet; and the grim-looking turnkey entered with a candle, which he placed upon the table. But who was it that followed him into that cell?—to whom was it that he bowed with such profound respect, while standing aside for this person to enter? It was a female closely veiled: but by her form and stature Kate knew her at once——It was the Minister's wife!

The turnkey withdrew,—merely closing but not bolting nor locking the door behind him: the lady threw up her veil—and the next moment she and Kate were clasped in each other's arms.

"I come to save you—I come to deliver you,

Miss Marshall!" said the Minister's wife. "I tell you this at once, without making it a condition for the information I seek. I would not insult you so unwarrantably as to adopt such a course——"

"Ah, my dear madam!" exclaimed Kate, joy and gratitude beaming upon her countenance: "I felt assured you would not desert me—but I did not expect to receive so soon the proof of your friendship."

"It is afforded so soon as I could possibly show it," responded the lady. "You can but too well conjecture that my project failed—that all was discovered: but you will rejoice for my sake to learn that the incidents of this night have made so powerful an impression upon my husband, he has suddenly become an altered man! The proofs he has given of this better state of feeling are most important for us both. To me he has promised amendment and a renewal of his love: to you he accords immediate freedom and the pardon of your attended husband."

Kate fell upon her knees, overcome with joy; and conveying the hand of the Minister's wife to her lips, she covered it with her kisses and her tears. The lady who brought this gladdening intelligence, likewise wept. It was a touching scene—full of an exquisite pathos—as the Minister's wife, compelling Kate Marshall to rise, once more strained her in her arms.

"I cannot regret," said the lady, "anything that has taken place, inasmuch as I feel assured it has given me back a husband—and that husband an altered and better man."

"To you, dear lady," answered Kate, smiling through her tears, "is the gratitude of all the rest of my existence due——not only my gratitude, but that of him whose life is saved through your kindness. Ah! now I bethink me—you spoke of certain information which you required; and I am at no loss to conjecture what it is. My papers were seized with the idea that your husband's written undertaking would be found amongst them: and it was not. No—I sent it away for a certain purpose, which I will explain——But fear not, dear lady!—it will fall into the hands of a kind friend of mine: and no use will be made of it prejudicial to your husband's interests."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks for that assurance," answered the Minister's wife: "you have relieved my mind from an immense load. For although I felt confident you would do nothing that should in any way violate the compact which was made between us, to the effect that if your aims were accomplished through my agency, you would spare my husband from the chance of exposure,—nevertheless I feared that it might be possible for that document to fall into other hands less scrupulous and less generous than your own."

"Listen, dear lady," answered Kate, "while I give you a few words of explanation. I have already spoken to you of that Count Christoval from whom I have received so much kindness, and through whose intervention the Captain-General of Catalonia suspended the extreme sentence of the law. The Count, as you are aware, still remains at Barcelona, in order to continue his generous services until the best or the worst being known, there should no longer exist a need for them. When you left me at the hotel this afternoon, I sat down to pen a few lines to Count Christoval,—not to make him aware of what was going on, but merely to give him to understand that within a few hours the question would be decided whether Edward Russell was to be pardoned or not. It was, I can assure you, my first intention when I took up my pen, thus to confine myself to a vague and simple statement. But as I began to write, other reflections entered my mind. What if your stratagem should altogether fail? what if the Minister, exercising those terrific powers wherewith he had threatened me, should have me seized upon, even in the dead of night—hurried out of Spain—and cast upon the Portuguese or French frontier? I shuddered at the thought; and then too, by a natural association, it occurred to me that the same agents of this arbitrary power might wrest from me the written document which I held;—and that document was the only means by which, under any circumstances, I could retain a hold over your husband!"

"I understand," observed the Minister's wife: "it was indeed most natural that these reflections should force themselves upon you. But proceed: for I am in haste to conduct you away from this horrible place:"—and the lady threw her shuddering looks around the massive walls of the cell.

"Having reflected in that manner," resumed Kate, "I deeply deplored that I had not consulted you on this subject: but those ideas had not entered my head previous to your departure—and when you were gone, I did not dare seek you at your own abode, for fear that his Excellency might observe me. I therefore thought to myself that it was absolutely necessary to secure the document by some means or another—and to dispose of it in such a way that it might serve for eventual good, in case all other circumstances became adverse. I accordingly wrote the fullest details to Don Christoval,—enclosing that document in the letter. I enjoined him the strictest secrecy, should it ultimately prove unnecessary to make use of the paper:—and he is a man of honour, madam—he will not deviate one tittle from the injunctions I gave nor from the course that I laid down for him to follow. I argued to myself that it was scarcely a breach of the compact made between yourself and me to adopt this course,—inasmuch as by your own counsel I obtained that undertaking from your husband."

"Not for a moment," responded the Minister's wife, "do I consider it a breach of the compact. Yes—I counselled you to obtain that undertaking, so as to ensure the granting of the pardon by my husband: and you did well to adopt the precaution which you are describing."

"My narrative will be terminated in a few minutes," resumed Kate. "Recollecting how his Excellency had threatened to avail himself of his power to intercept my correspondence at the Post-office, I deemed that medium of conveyance to be an unsafe one for the transmission of my letter to Don Christoval. I accordingly despatched it by a mounted courier, who took his departure for Barcelona at about five o'clock this evening."

"And what course," inquired the lady, "did you instruct Count Christoval to adopt?"

"I requested his lordship to take no step for eighteen hours after the receipt of my despatch: but if at the expiration of that time he received not a second despatch from me, he was *then* to

conclude that circumstances were adverse—that I was no longer the mistress of my own actions—that I was either in a prison or else being hurried out of Spain——"

"And in that case?" inquired the Minister's wife anxiously.

"In that case," responded Miss Marshall, "I implored and entreated that his lordship would lose not a moment in taking horse—speeding to Madrid—calling on your husband—and making such use of my written narrative, corroborated as it was by that undertaking, as under all circumstances he might think fit."

"Then no harm is done which may not be repaired!" exclaimed the lady, in a joyful tone. "You have conducted all these proceedings, my dear Miss Marshall, with a most delicate consideration towards myself, and with far more consideration than my husband deserved at your hands. But come—let us hasten away from this dreadful place."

Kate did not require to be told twice to put on her bonnet and shawl: the turnkey was waiting at the end of the passage—and as the door of the cell opened, he hastened forward to take the light and guide the two females forth. In a few minutes they stood in the open street; and Kate breathed the air of Freedom once more just as the prison clock was proclaiming the hour of three in the morning. The hotel where she lodged, lay in the same direction as that which the Minister's wife had to take; and therefore they proceeded together. Had it been otherwise, the magnanimous lady would have all the same felt it her duty to see Miss Marshall safe to her own residence.

"You will now snatch a few hours of that repose which must be so necessary," said the lady to Kate, when they reached the door of the hotel. "By ten o'clock I shall again be with you, the bearer of Edward Russell's pardon; and you will then lose no time in despatching another courier with the precious document to Count Christoval at Barcelona."

The Minister's wife bade Kate a temporary farewell; and the house-porter speedily answering her summons at the gate, she obtained admission into the hotel. Seeking her own chamber, she lost no time in retiring to rest; and well-nigh exhausted both in mind and body, she soon fell into a profound slumber.

When she awoke, it was nine o'clock; and the good-hearted landlady was standing by the side of the couch,—infinitely rejoiced to have heard that her guest had come back in the middle of the night, and to find that the intelligence given to her by the house-porter to this effect was indeed true. But inasmuch as the landlady had been kept in ignorance of all those transactions which were going on in respect to the Minister, his wife, and the stratagem devised by the latter,—the worthy woman could not conceive how it was possible Kate had been arrested as a Carlist Spy—an allegation which she herself had not for an instant believed. She accordingly said that she supposed it had been all a mistake on the part of the police?—and Kate, not wishing to be led into farther explanations, readily assured the landlady that such was the case.

At ten o'clock, faithful to her promise, the Minister's wife—again closely veiled—called upon Kate, and presented her with a packet, not only containing her lover's pardon, but likewise the letters which had been taken from her trunk on the preceding night. Again did Miss Marshall pour forth her fervid gratitude to the excellent-hearted lady: again was her joy displayed with bright smiles and glistening tears. Oh! to think that she should have succeeded in her cherished aim after having experienced so many threatening adventures—so much affliction—and even at one time so much despair! This crowning happiness was almost too much for her: but she was not one of those women who are apt to faint in periods of excessive grief or excessive joy; and thus her natural fortitude soon came to her assistance.

She lost no time, while the Minister's wife was still with her, in penning a few hasty lines to Don Christoval,—a few lines likewise to her beloved Edward Russell, assuring him that she was about to set off in a post-chaise to meet him at Barcelona. The pardon, and this note for Russell, were enclosed in a packet addressed to Don Diego Christoval: and then Kate hastened to the landlady's apartment, to inform her that her lover's life was saved, without any condition of minor punishment,—and to request that a courier should be at once obtained to bear this second despatch on the heels of the first. The worthy woman was so delighted that she could scarcely leave off embracing Kate, who was naturally impatient that not a minute's unnecessary delay should occur ere the messenger was in his saddle. She saw the man depart; and then hurried up to her own chamber, where the Minister's wife was waiting her return.

"Now, my dear Miss Marshall," said this lady, "before we separate I have a certain duty to fulfil,—a duty which, I have much pleasure in stating, was suggested by my husband: for he feels that even the granting this pardon is scarcely an adequate atonement for his conduct towards you. You perceive, therefore, that his regrets of last night were not transitory. Indeed he has been profoundly touched by all these circumstances—and not the least by the proofs of love which I have exhibited towards him. He desires me to seek on his behalf the express assurance of your forgiveness; and he beseeches that you will not refuse to accept the contents of this purse——Nay, do not shake your head, my dear Miss Marshall! You will accept this trifling present from me, even if you have any scruple in receiving it from him?"

"Dearest lady," answered Kate, with tears in her eyes, "I consider that his Excellency has made every atonement; and from the very bottom of my heart do I forgive him the temporary uneasiness which he caused me. And you, dear lady—you have proved yourself the kindest, the best of friends! But I cannot accept that purse—I need it not——Though not rich, I have ample means for my present purposes——"

"Enough, my dear Miss Marshall!" interrupted the lady: "we will say no more upon that subject. But you will not refuse to wear this for my sake:"—and she drew from her finger a splendid ring set with brilliants.

Kate could not reject a gift so generously and also so delicately proffered: she accordingly accepted it; and after many embraces and kind words, she and the Minister's wife bade each other

farewell. Within the hour, Kate was seated in a post-chaise, issuing forth from the Spanish capital on the high road to Barcelona.

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

NED RUSSELL.

ALTHOUGH the Captain-General of Catalonia had the power to suspend the execution of Ned Russell's sentence for three weeks, he had not granted a respite for that full period—but merely indefinitely. Don Diego Christoval was in reality somewhat alarmed at this circumstance: but in his letters to Kate, he had not chosen to increase her anguish by mentioning it: he however determined, as the reader has seen, to remain at Barcelona, so as to be upon the spot to renew his intercession and exert his influence afresh with the Captain-General, should it be necessary. He tolerably well comprehended the difficulty in which this great functionary found himself placed, and therefore understood how it was that he had not positively and specifically defined the respite for the full period of three weeks.

The fact was, that the utmost indignation prevailed amongst the inhabitants of Barcelona and the neighbourhood at the slaughter of the Custom-House officers; and a vindictive spirit called loudly for the summary wreaking of the law's penalty upon the head of Russell. The Political Chief, or supreme civil authority of the principality, was to a certain extent at enmity with the Captain-General; and he failed not to represent as a great grievance, the leniency shown towards the English smuggler-captain by suspending the sentence. Again, the commanders of the Spanish revenue-cruisers upon the coast, were terribly enraged at the vessel having escaped them; and requiring a vent of some kind or another for their excited feelings, they also clamoured for the prompt execution of the law's judgment pronounced against Edward Russell.

Thus was it that the Captain-General was sorely pressed by the state of public feeling and by the opinions of the authorities in his district,—so that, at the expiration of a fortnight, he sent for Don Diego Christoval, and assured him that he dared no longer delay issuing the warrant for the execution. This was on the very same day that Kate Marshall paid her second visit to the Minister, to make the appointment for the night—which appointment, as the reader has seen, was in reality to be kept by the Minister's lady. Count Christoval besought and implored that the Captain-General would suffer the dictates of mercy to ride dominant above the pressure of vindictive sentiments: he assured his Excellency that most strenuous measures were being adopted at Madrid to obtain Russell's pardon—that no doubt this pardon would be vouchsafed—and that he (the Captain-General) would therefore be much afflicted if by precipitating the execution, he should so fatally render abortive the results of the good offices that were actively making their way in the capital. It was upon a Wednesday that these representations were made: that day week the full period of three weeks, to which the Captain-General's discretionary power was limited, would expire. Don Christoval urged that it was but for this one poor week he sought the delay; and if nothing favourable transpired in the mean time, the sentence must then as a matter of course be carried into execution. Still the Captain-General shook his head, refusing to comply. Don Diego would not leave him: he plied him with all possible arguments and intercessions: and ultimately he succeeded in gaining a portion of what he asked. To be brief, the Captain-General consented to a compromise between his own inclinations on the one hand, and the clamour of the public on the other. He accorded a farther delay of three days,—adding emphatically that at eleven in the forenoon on the Saturday ensuing, the culprit must be executed, if no counter-instructions of any sort should arrive from Madrid. More than this Count Christoval could not obtain; and therewith he was forced to content himself.

Finding it now, therefore, useless to remain any longer in Barcelona,—and not even tarrying to obtain another interview with Ned Russell, whom, we should observe, he had seen almost daily during the fortnight which had elapsed since his arrival at Barcelona,—he mounted his horse and set out on the highway towards Madrid. The distance between Barcelona and the Spanish capital is above three hundred miles; and therefore Don Diego did not entertain the hope of reaching Madrid and returning to Barcelona within the prescribed interval. But he adopted his present proceeding for two reasons. In the first place, he thought it probable that Miss Marshall—if she had obtained the pardon—would, in her loving zeal and tender anxiety, be hastening with it herself to Barcelona,—the more so, as he had led her to suppose that there was still another clear week of respite for Ned Russell. If therefore she were upon the road, he hoped to meet her: he would receive the pardon from her hands—and to make everything sure, would gallop back day and night until he reached the Catalan capital once more. In the second place, he reasoned that she might have entrusted the precious document to a courier; and knowing that these individuals are apt to tarry and drink on the way, he resolved to make inquiries at every station and of every mounted messenger whom he might meet, to ascertain if the hoped-for paper were upon the road to Barcelona.

It was in the forenoon of Wednesday that he thus set out: and being an excellent horseman, as well as accustomed to the fatigues of travelling, he journeyed at a rapid pace. Resting as little as possible, and obtaining a fresh steed as often as circumstances would permit, he accomplished ninety miles by midnight,—which, considering the nature of the Spanish roads and the sorry animals used for posting or for couriers, was remarkably good. Allowing himself but a couple of hours to recruit his strength, he continued his way. Morning dawned; and after another rest, he sped along. It was about noon on the Thursday, that at a distance of one hundred and sixty miles from Barcelona, he encountered a courier whom he stopped, and to whom he put the same inquiries he had addressed to all the others he had previously met. This courier bore a despatch addressed to himself. It was the one which Kate had sent off in the latter part of the previous day, after her inter-

view with the Minister's wife at the hotel; and it contained the written undertaking signed by the Minister. Don Diego therefore saw that every hope was to be entertained: but as Kate intimated that another messenger would be sent off with a despatch to communicate the result, Count Christoval resolved to continue his ride towards the capital and thus fall in with the second messenger. It was late on the Thursday night that he met him; and the letter which he bore, contained the official pardon, duly signed and sealed by the Minister of the Interior. It would be easier to conceive than to depict the joy which the warm-hearted Don Diego experienced at this triumphant crowning of Kate Marshall's magnanimous endeavour to save her lover's life.

But the scene now shifts to Barcelona; and it is Friday night. In the principal square a number of men are raising the scaffold by torchlight. A guard of soldiers, drawn up around, keeps back the approach of the throng of inquisitive observers. The workmen wear masks upon their countenances; and the presence of the soldiery is to prevent the lookers-on from drawing so near as to be enabled to recognise any of these individuals so employed, either by their particular clothing, their stature, their voices, or the accidental slipping aside of their masks. In Spain it is considered infamous for any person to assist in erecting a scaffold for the purpose of a public execution; and it is therefore necessary to raise, as it were, by impressment the requisite workmen for this purpose. It is an act of rebellion on the part of those so impressed to refuse: the authorities however adopt precautionary measures, as just now explained, to save them from recognition,—so that they may not be thereafter taunted by their companions as "gallows-builders." Hence the working at night, and the masks upon the countenances of the workers.

It was a spectacle of solemn and awful interest,—those men with black crape upon their faces, erecting the scaffold in the midst of the square, in the centre of a *cordon* of soldiers,—the lurid glare of the torches guiding their operations, and throwing forth their forms with a Rembrandt-like effect. So closely were the soldiers marshalled in double ranks, that they not merely formed a barrier against the pressure of the crowd without,—but likewise a living wall to intercept the ruddy beams of the torches themselves: but these nevertheless played upon the bayonets, like lurid lightning on the points of so many conductors. In the iron balconies attached to the houses looking upon the square, crowds of persons—male and female, young and old, the well-born and the rich, the humble and the poor—were gathered to gaze upon the ominous spectacle; or rather to catch as much of it as could be seen through the darkness which surrounded the centre of light where the torches blazed. The work advanced rapidly: in a few hours the scaffold rose above the heads of the girdling ranks of soldiery; and long ere the first streaks of dawn were discernible in the horizon which joined the eastern waves, the sinister upright post with the strangling iron was erected. Then, a portion of the guard being left to protect the scaffold, the remainder marched away with the workmen in the midst,—the crowd being forbidden to follow on pain of the most serious consequences. The masked workmen were thus escorted to some obscure part of the city of Barcelona; and having received a liberal remuneration, they dispersed,—sneaking stealthily away to their respective homes.

Morning dawned upon Barcelona: the scaffold complete in all its appointments, stood in the market-place: a guard of soldiers surrounded it The crowd was every instant becoming more dense,—there being the same anxiety on the part of the Barcelonese to secure "a good place" to view the execution, as that which the populace of London displays on a public strangulation day in the Old Bailey. The balconies, too, of the circumjacent houses were thronged from an early hour: high prices were paid for sitting or standing room; and at the casements of many of the principal habitations, well dressed ladies might be seen. These, with their garments of black silk, their mantillas richly bordered with lace, their fans, and their satin slippers, appeared as if they were spectatresses awaiting the presence of some gorgeous pageant or gay scene, instead of the sombre and sinister procession of death. Yes: there they were, those lovely Catalan women,—seated in their balconies,—some sipping their chocolate, others conversing gaily, others quietly reading a novel,—and all awaiting the dread ceremony with the easiest air in the world.

But what of Ned Russell? what of him for whom the paraphernalia of death had been thus elaborately prepared, and on whose account these crowds were assembled? He was a prisoner in his gloomy cell,—having bidden adieu to all hope, and manfully resigning himself to the fate which he deemed inevitable. He feared not to die: and yet the hardy sailor brushed away a tear as he thought of that loving and much-loved being who would have to deplore his loss. He knew that she was at Madrid, endeavouring to obtain his pardon—or at least a commutation of his sentence: he knew likewise, from the same source (namely, Count Christoval) that she trusted to the strong letters she had received from the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebella, to accomplish her aim; and he knew that her disappointment must prove of the bitterest description. For disappointed she had evidently been——Alas, poor Kate—and again he wiped away a tear. But Count Christoval himself—wherefore came he not? It was now Saturday morning; and not since Tuesday had Russell seen him—nor in the interval had he heard from him. What could this mean? Not for an instant did the frank-hearted sailor suspect that the Spanish nobleman had deserted him at the very last: but he feared lest some accident should have befallen him. Once or twice during that interval, Ned Russell had caught himself giving way to the hope that this absence and silence on Don Diego's part, were in some way or another favourably connected with his own case—that something had transpired to turn the progress of events into another channel, requiring the Count's presence elsewhere—and that he had either no time to make a communication, or else that his message or letter had been entrusted to a neglectful emissary. But as the time drew near, Ned Russell suffered himself not to be buoyed up with this hope. He considered it not merely a weakness, but likewise a folly, to give way to hope on such

slender grounds;—and with true characteristic courage, he prepared to die. A Franciscan chaplain, attached to the gaol, had on several occasions, since Russell's confinement, endeavoured to persuade him to kneel and pray: but inasmuch as the worthy priest could only convey this intimation by signs—he being as ignorant of the English tongue as the prisoner was of the Spanish,—their intercourse had hitherto amounted to mere dumb-show, the priest wishing to enforce his object by means of gestures, and the captive as peremptorily refusing in a similar manner. But on this Saturday morning—the one fixed for the execution—the prison-chaplain made his appearance, accompanied by a brother Franciscan who could speak a little English; and the latter priest endeavoured to persuade Russell to accept the last consolations of religion. Now, Ned never had been at all of a religious character: not that he was an infidel nor a sceptic—on the contrary, he was a firm believer: but his mode of life had, for obvious reasons, somewhat militated against pious habits. He did not now choose to receive consolations from a Catholic: he therefore bluntly enough informed the priest who spoke English, that he should certainly like to have the spiritual comfort of a Protestant clergyman—but that if this were impossible, he would sooner make his peace with heaven in his own way, than accept the ministry of an ecclesiastic belonging to another faith. The priest argued and reasoned with him: the prisoner was firm, though perfectly respectful;—and finding that he could make no impression, the Franciscan knelt down, in company with the chaplain,—the two thus offering up prayers in Ned Russell's cell, but in a language which he could not understand.

He wished to be alone—he wished to commune with himself during the last moments which remained to him in this life: but the Franciscans would not hear of it—they persisted in remaining; and as he gave them credit for good intentions, he said nothing rude. Withdrawing his attention from them, however, as much as possible, he prayed inwardly, and with a heartfelt devotion which never in his life had he experienced before. But the intercession which he sent up to heaven from the very depths of his soul, was far more on his beloved Kate's account than his own; and he besought Providence to endow her with the fortitude to bear the bitter bereavement which he felt to be inevitable.

The fatal hour approached; and at about a quarter to eleven, the executioner entered the cell, accompanied by the governor of the prison, a notary, and three or four *gendarmes*. The notary read the warrant of execution, signed by the Captain-General, and of the issuing of which the prisoner had received due notice on the previous evening from the governor through the medium of an interpreter. The executioner then proceeded to bind the prisoner's arms and hands,—which he did in such a way as to give him the appearance of being in the attitude of prayer. A glass of wine was next held to his lips;—but this Russell refused: he would not have it thought that he was in the slightest degree indebted to alcoholic liquor for the courage which he felt sure he should be enabled to display.

A procession was now formed, the two priests leading it; and the front gate of the gaol was reached. Several streets had to be threaded in order to arrive at the place of execution. These thoroughfares were completely lined with troops,—behind whom there were but a few stragglers as lookers-on,—those whose curiosity was excited on the occasion, having long ere this secured their places in the vicinity of the scaffold. Nor were the balconies of the houses in these streets much crowded,—the inhabitants of those dwellings having likewise proceeded to that point which was the focus of supreme attraction.

Just outside the gate of the gaol, about twenty more Franciscan monks were assembled,—attended by a couple of acolytes, each of whom bore a lantern fixed at the end of a wand, and with wax-tapers burning inside,—the breeze which blew from the sea, rendering it necessary for the lights to be thus protected. But the main feature of the religious paraphernalia remains to be described. It consisted of an enormous crucifix, on which was a paste-board effigy of the Saviour, the size of life. It was carefully and skilfully painted—but had a most hideous and ghastly effect; inasmuch as it represented the gore trickling down from the crown of thorns—from the hands and the feet, pierced with nails—and from the wound in the side. This figure was borne at the head of the procession; and as it advanced, the soldiers crossed themselves; and most of the stragglers behind the military rank, fell upon their knees. The monks began to chaunt the litany in deep lugubrious voices; while two men wearing long dark cloaks, solicited alms, which were to be expended in masses for the doomed man's soul.

In this way the procession threaded the streets leading towards the great square,—on reaching which the hum of voices that had hitherto prevailed on the part of the crowds gathered there, sank into a dead silence; and naught was heard but the chaunting of the priests and the slow tread of footsteps. A pathway up to the scaffold was kept clear in the midst of the multitude, by two lines of soldiers; and over their heads silver and copper coins were showered for the benefit of the prisoner's soul,—the money being duly gathered up by the collectors in the long dark cloaks. Meanwhile Ned Russell had advanced in the midst of the procession with a firm step and a manly bearing. There was no bravado in his looks—merely the fortitude of a truly courageous man. He was apparelled in his sailor's garb,—all except his hat, which had been taken from him, it being a part of the ceremony that he should walk bare-headed to the scaffold. But the masses of his coal black hair clustered in natural curls above his high forehead; and doubtless many a spectatress thought it was a pity that so fine a man should be doomed to die. However vindictive the public sentiment had been towards him while he was still in his dungeon, it demonstrated itself not now:—neither by word nor gesture was an inimical feeling displayed: on the contrary, there were some evidences of sympathy in many parts of the crowd and at some of the balconies. Thus the procession moved on, the effigy being carried in front—the monks chaunting—the alms being collected—the acolytes bearing the lanterns with the wax-tapers—and the crowds crossing themselves in respect for that gore-stained image

of the Saviour. The scaffold was reached; the priests ranged themselves in two rows near the steps, up which Ned Russell mounted, accompanied by the executioner, the notary, the *gendarmes*, and the Franciscan who spoke English.

Every eye was strained to observe how the doomed man now conducted himself; but not the slightest evidence of fear could be detected. His step was firm—his looks quailed not—neither did his lips quiver. He bent his gaze steadily upon the upright post to which the strangling-iron was affixed; and in obedience to a signal made by the executioner, he sat himself down upon a low wooden stool placed against that post. A breathless silence pervaded the crowd: every neck was thrust forward—all eyes were rivetted upon that focus of such dread and fearful attraction: the sky was serene above—the sunbeams glinted on the points of bayonets, and on the drawn sabres of the *gendarmes*. It was a perfect sea of faces upturned towards the scaffold: or, to borrow another metaphor, the vast square itself seemed paved with human countenances,—while the spectators in the balconies had the appearance of countless groups of individuals suspended in iron cages to the house-fronts. Yes—all was silent, save and except the deep hollow chaunting of the priests, in which was drowned the voice of the Franciscan who spoke English, and who was earnestly enjoining the doomed man to press his lips to a small crucifix which the monk approached near enough to his countenance for the purpose. But Russell firmly though respectfully refused to comply with the injunction; and the senior of the *gendarmes* made the executioner a sign to proceed.

The punishment of the *garotte* can be explained in a few words. It consists of a collar of iron attached to a post, and so contrived as to tighten suddenly by the abrupt turning of a screw. The windpipe is thereby instantaneously closed; and death quickly ensues. It is a hideous punishment—and yet perhaps is preferable to either hanging or beheading: for no blood is shed—neither are the spectators revolted by the three or four minutes' duration of spasmodic convulsions and horrible writhings on the part of the victim. It must not be thought more painful than decapitation, while it is assuredly less so than death by the halter. Startling as the assertion may seem, it is nevertheless a fact that the head of a guillotined person lives for some seconds—perhaps even a minute, after it is severed from the trunk; while all the most excruciating and keenly agonising sense of existence is concentrated in the brain, until the nerves terminating there have ceased to throb and vibrate. As for hanging, the protracted convulsions—lasting even, as above stated, for some minutes—testify to the extent of the horrific agony endured. But in respect to the *garotte*, it is easy to comprehend how the sudden compressure of the windpipe in so violent a manner produces an almost instantaneous numbness or absence of feeling, in the midst of which life passes away. At all events, it is tolerably certain that this last-named mode of capital execution must be less painful as well as shorter than that of the other two, for the reasons set forth. All three are hideous—abominable—satanic: the punishment of death is a remnant of barbaric cruelty still lingering amidst our modern civilization: it is an atrocity which the good feeling and the good sense of the masses would abolish in a moment, ir they had the power, but which is maintained in spite of them by kings and aristocrats the better to enforce those savage laws which prevent society from making that rapid progress which, if it had its full play, would quickly abrogate royalties and patrician orders.

But to return to the scene in the great square of the Catalonian capital. Ned Russell—his arms closely pinioned—was seated upon the stool: the executioner had received the sign to finish the proceeding without delay; and the doomed man was made to place his back completely against the stout upright post. The iron collar was then fastened round his neck: his eyelids quivered not—neither did his lips: he breathed, with the secret voice of his soul, a quick but fervent prayer for Kate Marshall—he commended himself to his God—he thought that he had done with all the affairs of this life, and that in a few moments more he should be a corpse! Profound was the silence which still pervaded the gathered multitudes—a silence broken only by the low hollow dirge of the priests at the steps of the scaffold: every neck was stretched out—all breath was held: the chests of the men moved not—the bosoms of the women remained upheaved. All was suspense—deep, solemn, awful. The fingers of the executioner were upon the screw: in another twinkling of the eye it would have been all over with thee, Edward Russell!—when, from the extreme outskirt of the crowd, a voice cried out something—this something was taken up by other voices—hundreds of ejaculations swelled into thousands—and like the quick successive fire of musketry, the cries went on till they reached the foot of the scaffold; and then their meaning was understood by the persons standing thereon. It was a reprieve!

The crowd parted from the spot whence those cries had first commenced on the extreme verge: yes—that living ocean of people parted, even as parted the Red Sea to form a passage for the Israelites. And then was beholden a horseman covered with dust, urging the jaded steed along, and holding up a paper in his right hand. Whatsoever feeling of enmity the Barcelonese entertained towards Ned Russell when he was still a prisoner in his cell, had been to a considerable extent changed into sympathy, not unmixed with admiration, when his fine person was seen moving along with manly bearing towards the scaffold: but now both sympathy and admiration swelled into enthusiastic delight—and it seemed as if a really generous feeling, until this moment latent, had blazed up on the part of the myriads gathered there. Hats were waved—fans and kerchiefs likewise: the dark eyes of the Catalan women flashed joy from the balconies and from the midst of the multitudes in the square:—adown many a cheek, both male and female, did tears flow. On came the horseman, sitting like one intoxicated upon his steed: for full evident was it that he had journeyed far and had journeyed fast. We need scarcely say that the fingers of the executioner turned not the fatal screw: while Ned Russell felt that he was saved! Then, not on his own account—but for Kate's—dear Kate's—did such a gush of feelings well upward into his throat as

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almost to suffocate him; and a tear trickled down each cheek. The strong-minded man who would have scorned to weep for himself, was melted into tenderest feeling as the conviction smote him that he was saved through Kate, and that she at this moment was happy!

On came the horseman amidst the crowd which parted to afford him a passage,—closing however again immediately behind the heels of the jaded horse. On he came—that man so covered with dust—so travel-worn, that his nearest and dearest friends would not have recognized him at the time! On he came, amidst the plaudits of the crowd, with the pardon in his right hand! Although he saw full well that his mission was understood—although he saw likewise that he came not quite too late,—yet did he urge the staggering, panting, labouring animal on, until the steps of the scaffold were reached: and then, the instant he pulled in the horse, it dropped down heavily, blood gushing from its mouth and speedily turning into crimson the masses of white foam so thickly gathered there. The horseman was so exhausted that he had not sufficient energy nor agility to vault from the steed as it fell; and he lay beneath it. A dozen eager hands were in a moment stretched forth to extricate him from his dire peril; and this was accomplished to the satisfaction of those who lent their assistance, because they perceived that he was uninjured.

The pardon was handed up to the notary, who at once read it and made known its nature. The Franciscan priest who spoke English, and who was in reality a well-meaning kind-hearted man, hastened to communicate to Edward Russell that the document contained a full and unconditional pardon. In a moment the cords that bound his arms were severed—he was free: and the next instant his hand was warmly and fervidly grasped by Don Diego Christoval—the wearied and travel-worn horseman. Then shouts of applause rent the skies; and the name of the Count being mentioned as that of the bearer of the pardon, the warm-hearted Spanish nobleman found himself as much the object of enthusiastic interest as he whom he had come to save.

Let us pass over a few hours. It was evening—and in a well-furnished apartment at the principal hotel at Barcelona, two persons were awaiting the arrival of a third. The table was spread for dinner: the light of the candles was reflected by a goodly display of plate—bottles of champagne were cooling in ice: it was evident that this was to be a banquet to be partaken of under no ordinary circumstances, although but three were to sit down to it. One of the two persons was Count Christoval; and he lay reclining upon the sofa, still much exhausted. The other was Ned Russell, who was walking to and fro in a kind of delighted impatience,—every minute going to the window to see whether the chaise was approaching that was to bear Kate to his arms. He was apparelled in an entirely new suit of clothes which Don Diego had lent him, and which set off his fine form to the fullest advantage which such well-cut garments were calculated to produce. So full of elysian animation was his countenance, that whatsoever ravages imprisonment might have produced thereon, were lost in that enthusiastic glow.

It was seven o'clock; and according to Count Christoval's computation, Kate might be expected every moment. It will be remembered that the despatch she had sent off by the second courier, and which was addressed to his lordship, contained a note for Ned Russell, telling him when she should depart from Madrid, and that she should travel as quick as possible to join him in Barcelona. Thus was it known that she could not be much longer ere she made her appearance. Nor was she. A chaise presently came dragging along the street: it stopped at the entrance of the hotel—Russell waited not to observe who alighted—but darting from the room, he precipitated himself down the stairs; and cries of joy echoed in the hall as he and his beloved Kate were clasped in each other's arms. Oh! that was a joyous meeting,—a meeting such as neither of them can ever forget for the remainder of their lives! Nearly nine years have elapsed (at the time this narrative is written) since that memorable evening; and often and often does the recollection thereof come back to them fraught with ineffable feelings; it comes back to them like a delicious harmony stealing over the ocean of the past—it comes back to them like a strain of heavenly music, and ever productive of chastening sentiments, making them wiser and better, and strengthening, if possible, the love which they bear for each other and which can know no ceasing.

But let us not anticipate. Ned Russell conducted Kate Marshall up into the room where Don Christoval was waiting. In a few rapid words he had informed her, as they ascended the stairs, how that excellent-hearted nobleman had arrived in the very nick of time—and how in another instant it would have been too late. Kate threw herself at Don Christoval's feet: she took his hand—she pressed it to her lips—she tried to speak—she could not: her emotions overpowered her. But he understood all that the grateful young woman meant to express: his tears showed that he thus comprehended her. They sat down to the banquet; and though they were but three, it was as joyous and happy an one as if there had been a hundred guests vowed to unalloyed hilarity. The sparkling champagne was drunk; and when the feast was over, Miss Marshall recited her adventures in full, from the moment she parted with Don Diego Christoval in Catalonia, until the instant the pardon was placed in her hands. Ned Russell shuddered when he thus heard of all that his beloved had gone through for his sake—how she had so nearly lost her life in the forest, and what indignities she had suffered at the hands of the Minister of the Interior. But they all three commented lightly and gently upon these latter circumstances: for Kate had come harmless and unscathed through the fiery ordeal which had threatened to brand her chastity; and the Minister had made as much atonement as a man could render for a grievous wrong—a wrong which however was not, after all, irreparable.

On the following day Don Diego Christoval, Ned Russell, and Kate Marshall,—accompanied by a young Englishwoman who happened to be at the hotel, and was desirous to return to her native country,—set out in a post-chaise on their way to France. The young woman was a nursery-governess, who had come to Barcelona with an English family, but whom she had left in consequence of ill-usage.

For delicacy's sake, Kate was well pleased to have such a travelling-companion added to the party; and the young female herself was rejoiced at the proposal to journey free of expense back to her own island. We need not follow them on the route; suffice it to say that in due course they reached Calais in safety—and thence they embarked for Dover. Infinite was the joy of Kate's parents and sisters as they welcomed her arrival and hailed the presence of Ned Russell. There were such festivities at the *Admiral's Head*—such tales to tell—such adventures to recite—so much to talk over and over again, that it seemed as if neither the rejoicings nor the narratives would ever end. Don Diego was unfeignedly happy at this spectacle of perfect bliss; and he considered the circumstances favourable for a little piece of advice which he had intended to volunteer to Ned Russell. This was to the effect that it would be better for the gallant sailor to avoid his smuggling adventures in future. Thereunto Russell replied that he had already made up his mind, not merely to abandon such expeditions, but to give up the sea entirely,—adding that even if he were utterly destitute of resources, he should consider it his duty to look to some other means of gaining a livelihood, so as to avoid being ever more separated from the admirable young woman who had saved his life. But he had some little property wherewith to commence the world anew; and moreover, the sale of his vessel, which had arrived safely in port, would increase his store. Don Diego then proceeded to observe, in as delicate a manner as possible, that by way of indemnifying Ned Russell for the loss of his freight which fell into the hands of the Spanish Custom House officers, he intended to make him a present of five hundred pounds. Russell would not hear of it: the Count insisted. Old Marshall overheard what was going on; and backing Ned's decision, promised to provide so bountifully for his daughter when the marriage should take place, as to supersede the necessity of this farther display of his lordship's generosity. The Count was therefore over-ruled: but before he left Dover, he made Kate and Ned Russell such handsome presents that, so far as the amount went, they almost fulfilled his original intention.

"We shall be married in three weeks, my lord," said Russell, just previously to the nobleman's departure for Edenbridge Park, on the second day after his arrival at Dover,—the Marshalls having compelled him to give them his company thus long,—treating him as if he were a god who had descended amongst them,—"we shall be married in three weeks, my lord: and depend upon it, I shall make the best of husbands, as I am sure Kate will make the best of wives. Do you think, my lord, that if ever anything was to put her out and she did say a harsh word—which I know she won't,—but even if she did, do you think I would give her one in return? No, never! I would kiss her back into good humour. I would sooner kill myself than draw a tear from her eye, or make her beautiful face look mournful by any conduct on my part. I shall never forget what she has done for me—never forget all that she has gone through! The bare idea of it, as well as my own sufferings, has made me an altered, and, I think, a better man. As for your lordship, your name will ever be a household word with us——And," added Ned Russell, "if we are blessed with a son, I shall take the liberty—and hope no offence—of calling him Christoval after your lordship."

"And depend upon it," responded the warm-hearted nobleman, "I shall be rejoiced to stand god-father."

Don Diego took his departure, followed by the kindest wishes and sincerest expressions of gratitude on the part of Ned Russell and the Marshalls. On the very same day Kate gave away her carrier-pigeons to some neighbour who had long fancied them, and who she was well aware would treat them kindly; and the little reception-place, as well as the curiously-contrived trap-door, disappeared from the roof of the *Admiral's Head*. Kate looked back with sorrow upon the somewhat lax notions which she had hitherto entertained in certain particulars: for *she* also felt, as did her intended husband, that the incidents of the last few weeks had their moral teachings which were not to be disregarded. In this better frame of mind she possessed all the elements to render her an admirable member of society; and such she was resolved to become. The same purifying influence was shed throughout the family; and no long interval of time elapsed ere they felt that calamity and adversity often have their sovereign uses.

Three weeks after the return to Dover, Ned Russell led Kate Marshall to the altar. It was a blithe and happy day; and again was the *Admiral's Head* a scene of festivity and rejoicing.

CHAPTER CXLIX.

THE WIFE.

The reader will not have forgotten that the mansion of the Viscount and Viscountess de Chateauneuf stood upon a gentle eminence about a mile distant from the picturesque village of Auteuil. We have already stated that by his marriage with the sugar-baker's daughter, the Viscount obtained an annual revenue equivalent to twenty thousand pounds sterling of British money; and this income, large for any individual in any country, was an immense one for a French nobleman. It is therefore scarcely necessary to observe that the chateau was furnished in the most sumptuous manner—or that there were troops of domestics forming the household establishment. But riches do not constitute happiness: and this was a truth which the poor Viscountess could, if she had chosen, proclaim with the utmost sincerity.

Stephanie possessed a warm and generous disposition: but her mind was not as powerful as her heart was sensitive. She loved her husband with all that heart and with all her soul; and she had expected, on accompanying him to the altar, that his attachment would be equally fervid. She soon however found that it was not so; and, as Madame Durand had explained to Mrs. Chesterfield, the Viscountess sought to find in herself the causes of this coldness on her husband's part, rather than to make them the source of reproach towards him. She exerted all her powers to please: she was never wearied of lavishing upon him the most delicate attentions and the tenderest caresses, if he would only give her an opportunity of proffering

them. She studied to render herself agreeable: she scrupulously examined her own conduct, bearing, and manners,—comparing them with those of her female acquaintances,—in order to ascertain wherein she herself was deficient, so that she might improve according to those finished models. But her endeavours were thrown away, so far as her husband was concerned. Two years had they been married at the time when we introduce them to our reader; and it seemed as if the Viscount was thoroughly wearied of his wedded life. Any society was agreeable to him in preference to that of his spouse; and yet he had not as yet treated her with direct unkindness, much less with downright cruelty. But he was indifferent; or perhaps indeed he entertained a stronger feeling in respect to her—one bordering upon aversion. Sufficiently magnanimous, however, to conceal this, he forced himself to treat her with courtesy when they were together: but courtesy from a husband to a wife is a very sorry substitute for the endearments of love.

The reader will recollect that we took a temporary leave of Augusta Chesterfield and the Viscount de Chateauneuf, at the moment when the former consented to abandon herself to the latter, and when the young nobleman, full of rapturous delight, snatched her to his breast. A fortnight had now passed since that date; and the Viscount was a constant visitor at the Durands' villa. He passed nearly his whole time with Mrs. Chesterfield: he was infatuated with her. Possession was not accompanied with satiety: on the contrary, it only augmented the vehemence of the passion which he experienced for her. Perhaps the ardour of her own temperament sustained the fiery feelings of sensuous desire which her truly remarkable beauty had in the first instance excited: while her conversation—for she was a highly accomplished and intellectual woman—rendered her an agreeable companion. Thus was it that the Viscount was never wearied of her society; and he regretted that he could not be entirely with her from morning till night and from night till morning. But he had not as yet thought of perpetrating an abrupt outrage towards his wife by abandoning her altogether,—though even *this* he would assuredly have done, if Augusta Chesterfield required him. She however had said naught on the subject—but had rather acted as if she were anxious to avoid an explosion of scandal as much as possible, and to keep their amour as secret for the present as circumstances would permit. Such, at least, appeared to be her policy. As a matter of course, the Durands saw what was going on; but they were by no means shocked thereat—nor did Madame Durand venture the slightest remonstrance. In the first place, those things are not thought of so much in France as they are in this country; and in the second place, the Viscount de Chateauneuf failed not to make the Durands some very handsome presents almost immediately after his connexion with Mrs. Chesterfield had begun. Nor were the servants at the little villa forgotten; and a liberal douceur, presented to each, ensured the secrecy that was thus sought to be obtained.

We have said that a fortnight had elapsed since the commencement of that amour; and we must now direct the reader's attention to a particular morning, when the following scene took place.

In a sumptuously furnished apartment at the chateau on the eminence, the Viscount and Viscountess were seated at breakfast. The young lady was, as Madame Durand had described her, eminently beautiful,—with chesnut hair, dark blue eyes, and a transparent complexion. Of slender shape, she possessed a figure the lightness of which was replete with elegance and grace, but not of too sylphid a symmetry to be without well-developed proportions. She had not that vivacity which usually characterises the women of France; but her manners, as well as her style of beauty, would have led a stranger to pronounce her a native of England. She was more tranquil than the gay Parisian ladies are wont to be: modest, unassuming, and without affectation, she was as incapable of coquetry or of flirting as she was averse to the fulsome adulation which is offered up at the shrine of female beauty in the brilliant circles of fashion. Thus, when she sought to be very cheerful, in the hope of pleasing her husband, the endeavour was visibly forced,—because she was too unskilled in the arts of dissimulation to conceal it. But let us listen to their discourse, as they are seated at the breakfast table between nine and ten o'clock on the particular morning of which we are speaking.

"My dear Jules," said the Viscountess, after a long pause, and now speaking with a considerable degree of hesitation, though in the most affectionate manner, "I hope you will not forget that you have guests to dinner this evening?"

"Ah, I remember!" he ejaculated, with an air of vexation: "a party made expressly for the Villebelles! It was absolutely necessary to invite them; for the Marquis and I were schoolfellows—though he is some three or four years older than myself."

"You seem annoyed, my dear Jules," observed his wife, gazing upon him with tender anxiety, "that the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle should have been invited?"

"Oh, no! not annoyed, I can assure you!" exclaimed the Viscount, forcing himself to laugh with an assumed gaiety. "Annoyed?—no, that is out of the question—only I was thinking that it was just possible I might be detained by business——"

"Pardon me for asking the question," said the Viscountess, kindly,—"but have you, my dear Jules, anything to trouble you? If so, pray speak, that I may do my best to soothe and console you."

"Trouble me, Stephanie!" he cried. "What could have put such an idea into your head?"

"Only," she answered, still more timidly and reluctantly than before, "because—because you have been away from home so much of late—that—that—I was fearful you had some business of a disagreeable nature——"

"And pray, Stephanie," exclaimed the Viscount somewhat sharply, "can I not be away a few hours of a day without subjecting myself to be thus catechised?"

"Oh! catechised, Jules! No—no—not for the world! I did not mean *that*:"—and as the big tears rolled down the poor young lady's cheeks, she rose from her place at the table, and throwing her arms around her husband's neck, besought him in a broken voice to pardon her if she had offended him.

"Offended me—no, Stephanie! you have not offended me!" he said, forcing himself to give a single caress for the dozens she lavished upon him; and then he suddenly repulsed her, as if the kiss which he had bestowed was an act of treason towards Augusta Chesterfield.

Thus did he prove himself more scrupulously considerate on behalf of his mistress who was elsewhere, than on behalf of his beautiful wife who was there present, doing her best to demonstrate the love she bore him!

"Jules, wherefore repulse me?" she murmured, with a look of such deprecating tenderness that his conscience was smitten. "What have I done to grieve or annoy you? You assure me that you are not offended with me; and yet I perceive the contrary. Tell me what I can do to convince you that it was unintentional on my part."

"Really, my dear Stephanie, you are most unreasonable," said the Viscount. "Pray sit down and think no more of what I have said—what I have done——"

"But if you be angry with me, Jules?" she observed, as she meekly resumed her chair.

"Angry—no!" he cried, almost petulantly. "Wherefore should you persist in saying that I am angry? Really, Stephanie, I must henceforth be very guarded over my looks and my words that the least thing thus brings tears to your eyes."

"Do you not know, Jules," she continued, still weeping, "how much I love you? and will you be so cruel as to upbraid me for being sorry when I think I have given you offence, or when I fail to please you? I wish—I wish, Jules, that you would understand me better!"

"Stephanie, I understand you full well," the Viscount hastened to respond: "but we have been married two years, and are no longer lovers: we are husband and wife."

"No longer lovers?" she ejaculated, as if a new light had suddenly been flung in upon her mind: then, as the tears gushed forth anew from her eyes, she added, "Oh, I had hoped and thought we should always be lovers, and that we should not cease to exist as such because our hands were united at the altar."

"See, Stephanie," ejaculated the Viscount, "how unreasonably—I might almost say, how foolishly you talk. And it is because these ideas which you have just expressed, rule your actions likewise, that I may perhaps seem a little impatient towards you. At the slightest word you weep——you frequently give me hints that I am absent from home—and in the presence of friends your conduct is *too* endearing. You do not seem to know how to draw the proper distinction between the bearing which lovers adopt towards each other, and that which husband and wife ought to maintain."

"I only know, Jules," was the unsophisticated answer of the beautiful Viscountess, while her heart swelled with emotions,—though she now contrived by a powerful effort to keep back her tears, fearing to give her husband renewed offence,—"I only know that I love you; and I obey the dictates of my own heart in all my conduct towards you."

"But do you not see, Stephanie," resumed her husband, "that a man cannot always remain tied to his wife's apron-string. When we are together, I do my best to render you happy and contented——"

"Yes—*when* we are together," she murmured, without the slightest intention of conveying a remonstrance or a reproach, but merely giving audible expression to her own unsophisticated thoughts: for the idea that was uppermost in her mind, was that she had no earthly happiness save and except in the society of her husband, and that she could wish him to be always with her.

"Now, look how you answer me!" he cried, with a sudden start and gesture of impatience. "If I make a simple observation, your reply is a remonstrance—an upbraiding—a taunt——"

"Good heavens, Jules, what a construction you put upon my words!" she exclaimed, an expression of anguish upon her countenance, and her hands clasped in despair. "I did not mean it—no, I did not mean it! Why will you thus take offence, dear Jules, where none was intended?"

"But, Stephanie, these scenes are little calculated to render my home happy. And," added the Viscount, greedily clutching at any excuse which might satisfy his conscience for his treatment towards his beautiful and affectionate wife: "and—and—it is really no wonder that I should sometimes stay out longer than I otherwise intended——"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "now I have learnt the fatal truth at last! Yes, yes—I all along suspected it! Nay, more—I was convinced of it! It is I who make your home wretched—it is I who drive you from it!—and yet heaven knows that I would make any sacrifice to keep you with me! I am miserable when you are absent: and therefore it would be madness on my part wilfully to force you to remain away."

With these words, the unhappy young lady covered her countenance with her hands, and burst into a fresh paroxysm of anguish. Her bosom was convulsed with sobs; and if the most dreadful calamity had just alighted upon her head, it was impossible for her to be more afflicted. In the midst of this scene a domestic in a splendid livery entered the room, bearing the morning's letters and newspapers upon a silver salver. The Viscount snatched them up in a petulant manner: while Stephanie, quickly removing her fair white hands from her face, leant over her plate to conceal her tears from the lacquey.

"See how you disgrace me!" ejaculated her husband, when the servant had retired and the gilded door had closed behind him. "Now I shall acquire the reputation of ill-treating you. That fellow will go amongst the other servants and say how he found you in tears."

"Forgive me, Jules—pray forgive me, my dearest husband! I see that I am always in the wrong——"

"There you are again, with your reproaches!" interrupted the Viscount. "You mean me to understand that *I* am in the wrong—that I treat you cruelly——"

"Good heavens!" murmured the unfortunate Viscountess, now wringing her hands in despair; "what am I to do—what am I to say, to convince you that I had no such intention? Ah, Jules, if you could only read my heart, as God now reads it——"

"Positively, Stephanie," ejaculated the Viscount, starting up angrily from his seat, "this scene is becoming wearisome to a degree. If we were still lovers, it would be bad enough: but from a wife to her husband, it is really intolerable. I must beg and beseech that you will not give way to these gusts of temper."

"Temper?" she echoed, as if a new light had broken in upon her, thus suddenly making her aware that her temper was a bad one—an assurance which she was fully prepared to take on the mere word of her husband, and to adopt the fault as sincerely and contritely as if the imputation were perfectly correct.

"Yes, *temper!*" he answered, somewhat fiercely: for on his side the impression was that his wife had echoed the word in a spirit of indignant repudiation: "I said *temper*—and since it has come to this, I may as well be candid with you at once. Now, look you, Stephanie," he continued—and we must do him the justice to add that he did not at the moment perceive how his unfortunate spouse was regarding him with mingled affright and dismay,—"look you, Stephanie! I am getting thoroughly wearied of these scenes: they are repeated too often. Always tears, or else implied upbraidings—and then a perfect storm of lavished endearments! That is not the life I wish to lead. Try and be always the same; and I shall be always the same to you. But don't disgrace me in the presence of our servants. You seem to think, Stephanie, as I just now said, that I am to be ever tied to your apron-strings—that now I have become the husband, I am still to play the lover. I can do nothing of the sort; and what is more, I do not intend to attempt it. If you think that because you brought me a fortune, you have a right to a devotion such as is only displayed during the period of courtship——"

"Jules," exclaimed the Viscountess, springing forward and falling upon her knees at her husband's feet, while her clasped hands were stretched out towards him: "do not—do not, for heaven's sake, attribute such unworthy thoughts to me! My fortune—or the fortune that I brought you—I have never once thought of it! Would to God that I had been ten times as rich, that I might have bestowed all, all upon you——"

Here was another offence—though the reader may full easily comprehend how very far it was from the unfortunate young lady's intention to give it. But she stopped short suddenly, perceiving how her husband started—how his countenance became stern—and how he drew himself up with the haughtiest dignity.

"Madam," he said, "rise from that posture. It is not one which I ever desire my wife to adopt towards me:"—then as the Viscountess rose to her feet—cowed, dismayed, and full of anguish—he went on to say, in a tone which struck her as implacably severe, "Your words have conveyed such a taunt as I little expected ever to hear issue from your lips. You would remind me that I owe my wealth to you; and though you gave the assurance the semblance of love, yet was it the cruellest of reproaches thus to declare that you wished you had been richer so as to lavish your fortune upon me! Ah! then I am a sort of pensioner—I am bribed with gold? Verily, madam, I would have you reflect that rank is above wealth, and that I gave you a name which all the sugar-baker's money-bags never could have purchased."

With this heartless speech the Viscount de Chateauneuf turned abruptly upon his heel: but as a low moan struck his ear, he was smitten with remorse for what he had said; and turning quickly round again, was only just in time to catch his anguished wife in his arms. For, overpowered by the cruel violence of that blow which his words had dealt her, she was tottering and about to fall.

"Stephanie! Stephanie!" he exclaimed, half petulantly, half kindly: "how foolish of you to provoke these scenes!"—yet he felt that he himself was wrong, though thus endeavouring to fling all the blame upon her.

"Forgive me, Jules," she murmured, feeling it was a luxury thus to be clasped in his arms. "I do indeed see that my conduct has been very wrong——I know that I make you unhappy—every day tends to convince me of my own failings, and that I am not fitted to be your wife——But bear with me, Jules; and I will endeavour—Oh! I will endeavour, to be more guarded in future!"

"Well, well, Stephanie," said the Viscount, his conscience torturing him as if a scorpion were planting its sting in his heart,—"let there be an end of this."

"There shall, Jules," she murmured, smiling sweetly upon him as his arms still clasped her slender waist. "But tell me that you love me—do tell me that you love me——"

At this instant the door again opened,—and the lacquey re-appeared, bearing upon the silver salver a letter which by some accident had been omitted from the batch previously brought in. The Viscount became crimson, and turned away from Stephanie as if he had been caught embracing the wife of another instead of his own. The incident was a most untoward one. The quarrel—if such it could be called, where the quarrelling was all on his own side—had just been about to end in reconciliation, when the appearance of this servant made all Jules de Chateauneuf's choler rise up again.

"Stephanie, this is perfectly intolerable!" he ejaculated vehemently, and almost fiercely, the moment the lacquey had again left the room. "You disgrace me thoroughly! At first it is whining and crying, so that the servants think you are ill-treated: then it is this maudlin embracing, so that they will fancy I am begging your pardon, confessing I am a naughty boy, and that I will never do such a thing again! Now, all this is only bringing me into contempt; and when I next look my servants in the face, I shall see a sneering smile upon their lips. It is brought about by your folly——"

"I am indeed most unfortunate," murmured the poor young lady, sinking down upon a seat. "I endeavoured to please you—but I cannot!"

"There you are again!" ejaculated the Viscount, stamping his foot upon the carpet. "Why will you persist in this style of upbraiding? It does no good—it only creates ill-feeling——"

"My dear husband," said Stephanie, now rising up, and looking as well as speaking with a sort of despairing calmness, "I am afraid that you will never have real happiness with me. I am not fitted to be your wife: I am beneath you in birth

—beneath you in education—beneath you in knowledge of the world——"

"Stephanie, you will drive me mad!" cried Jules: for these were precisely the ideas which he *did* entertain in respect to his wife, but which nevertheless he could not bear to have so forcibly brought to his mind, and by that very wife herself. "You must not talk thus——"

"Well, I will not. We will speak on other subjects. Ah! I remember, we were just now conversing about the dinner-party: for the Villebelles, you will remember, are coming. What little I saw of the Marchioness the other day, when you introduced me to her, I liked very much. I should be pleased to cultivate her acquaintance: I think she would become my friend;—and I feel that I do want a friend—a real friend! There are times when I am so lonely—so dull—so desponding——"

This was another unfortunate speech, but made in a perfectly artless manner, and most unreflectingly.

"By heaven, another taunt!" ejaculated the Viscount. "How many more complaints? However," he immediately added, perceiving that his poor wife was becoming so deadly pale again that it seemed as if she were about to faint,—"we will not say any more now—we will not renew these unpleasant topics."

"No, don't—pray don't," she murmured, with a look of earnest appeal: then approaching him half tenderly, half timidly—but not venturing to embrace him, nor even to take his hand, nor place her own lovingly upon his shoulder, as she longed to do,—she said, "Do not forget, dear Jules, that the company will be here by seven. And," she added, perfectly innocent of any sinister motive, "it is not yet eleven o'clock: so you have plenty of time to amuse yourself till dinner."

He was about to ejaculate that this was another taunt: but feeling the inutility of renewing the war of words—or rather of prosecuting it on his own side—he said, "No, no—I shall not forget—I will be home by seven:"—and he quitted the room.

Stephanie proceeded mechanically towards one of the windows; and in a few minutes, as she gazed vacantly forth, she observed her husband hurrying along in the direction of Auteuil. He was on foot: she looked wistfully after him in the hope that he would turn his head and wave his hand—but he did not; and she could not help feeling disappointed that he should not think it possible she might be at the window. Then, as she remained there, watching his receding form, she could not help noticing the hurried manner in which he was proceeding;—and now she bethought herself that for the last fortnight he had not been once out on horseback. This circumstance had not occurred to her before: and though not for a single instant did she now regard it as suspicious, yet she nevertheless wondered thereat. She knew how passionately fond he had ever been of equestrian exercise; and it was therefore natural she should marvel that he had ceased to take it. But she soon fell into another train of reflections in respect to Jules; and retiring to her own boudoir, sat herself down to review all the details of the scene which had just taken place,—so as to glean therefrom the necessary hints to reform her conduct for the future. For the poor creature really and truly believed that all the fault was on her own side; and that she therefore did indeed require such self-reformation.

CHAPTER CL.

THE MISTRESS.

The Viscount de Chateauneuf hurried along in the direction of the Durands' villa. He sped thus precipitately, in order if possible to outstrip his own thoughts. He was too intelligent not to comprehend that he had been harsh, severe, and cruel towards his wife; and he was too generous not to regret it. Still he really and truly did believe that she had intended as taunts some of the things which she had said: but he could not help acknowledging that by his own conduct he fully deserved them. He knew that he was wrong—he knew that Stephanie loved him—and he felt that he was guilty of a monstrous injustice in punishing her for the very testimonials of affection which she lavished upon him. There was a moment during this rapid run from his chateau to the villa, when he felt inclined to turn abruptly back—retrace his steps—take his wife in his arms—confess his error—and vow that he would be cruel to her no more: for this was the first time that ever such serious words had passed between them, or that he had actually shown open resentment at what he had described as the "scenes" which were wont to take place. Hitherto those scenes had been insignificant in comparison with this one of to-day; and thus was it that his remorse was for an instant so poignant.

But, alas! that good resolution was abandoned almost as suddenly as formed: he had not the moral courage to retrace his way and perform the part which his better feelings had for an instant suggested. Besides, could he abandon his Augusta? No, no—he could not; and he hastened onward to the Durands' villa. For the rest of the distance he endeavoured to reason himself into the belief that he was justified in the course he was pursuing—that Stephanie was indeed unfitted to be his wife—and that he had therefore a right to have a mistress. And then, too, he contrasted Augusta with Stephanie,—the former all fervid passion, the latter all girlish love without its fiery sensuality—the former glowing and ardent, the latter only sentimentally tender—the former a companion who could talk upon a thousand things, the latter an inexperienced creature whose very ingenuousness was irksome and whose *naïveté* was that of a school-girl. Still, as the Viscount thus drew his comparison between his mistress and his wife, he could not crush the secret feeling which was in his mind, that his conduct was an injustice, an outrage, and a cruelty towards that affectionate being who he knew would, if necessary, lay down her life to serve him. He was glad when he reached the villa; for he longed in the arms of Augusta to forget all these remorseful and compunctious feelings.

Mrs. Chesterfield was half reclining upon a sofa in the sitting-room when Jules de Chateauneuf made his appearance. She wore an elegant

morning-wrapper, somewhat more open at the bosom than was consistent with modesty: the luxuriant masses of her raven hair floated over her half-naked shoulders; and her large dark eyes swam in a delicious languor, as she smilingly welcomed the Viscount's presence. The logs crackled and blazed in the fire-place: the atmosphere of the apartment was warm and slightly perfumed. Though not yet mid-day, the appearance of that voluptuous creature and the fragrance which seemed to breathe around her, made the hour appear as fitted for the blandishments of love as if night were upon the earth, the curtains were drawn, and the lamps lighted.

"You are later than usual, my dear Jules," said Augusta, as he placed himself on the sofa by her side and encircled her waist with his arm. "Ah! and I perceive that something has troubled you," she added, her taper fingers pushing back the masses of naturally curling hair from over the high forehead of that youthful countenance which was so fine a specimen of masculine beauty. "Tell me, dearest Jules,"—and she imprinted a glowing kiss upon his cheek,—"what is it that has annoyed you?"

"Augusta," he replied, with the suddenness of a resolve taken in a moment, "I cannot lead this life any longer! I cannot divide my time between you and my wife: my heart is *here*—and I am wearied of playing the dissembler *there*. It is cruel and unjust towards every one: cruel and unjust towards you—cruel and unjust towards my wife—cruel and unjust towards myself! No, I can endure it no longer! I must be all in all to you, as you are all in all to me——I will leave you no more!"

"Tell me, dear Jules, what has taken place," said Mrs. Chesterfield, gazing with fervid tenderness upon her paramour. "Have you had words with the Viscountess?"

"Words?" he ejaculated: "henceforth I feel that we shall always have words, if we continue to live together! It cannot be! It is impossible that I can receive her caresses only to repulse them: *that* is a part my better feelings will not longer allow me to play. No, I cannot! Much rather would I break with her at once—candidly confess to her that I love another—and beseech her not to interfere with my happiness!"

While he was thus speaking, Mrs. Chesterfield drooped her head upon his breast; and as her countenance was thus concealed from him, an expression of triumphant satisfaction appeared thereon,—as if she felt that she had now brought him to the point towards which she had gradually, and cautiously, and skilfully been leading him on. And if he could only have seen that look, transient though it were, a veil would have fallen from his eyes in a moment: he would have penetrated the selfishness of the syren to whom he had abandoned himself—he would have had the conviction flashing to his soul that though the ardour of her sensual passions might be real enough, the tenderness of true love which she professed for him, was naught but a delusion and a snare!

"What would you do?" she asked, assuming a low tremulous voice: "would you precipitate matters?"

"There can be no rash precipitation," he exclaimed, "in doing that which has now become imperative. I must either renounce you or my wife. I cannot renounce you, my Augusta, whom I love so devotedly: but I will renounce her whom I love not and have never loved. The world must know it at length: but the world shall say I have not been unjust towards her. I will give her half my fortune: the remaining half will leave me still rich—amply rich enough for you and me to live in comfort, and even in splendour."

"Then do you mean, my beloved Jules," asked Augusta, "that we are to live openly together henceforth—that the necessity for secrecy shall exist no more—that caution shall no longer be used?"

"Such is my meaning," ejaculated the Viscount vehemently. "Do you object, Augusta? do you still tremble at the idea of all this coming to your husband's knowledge?"

"Candidly I do," she answered, raising her head and looking him earnestly in the face.

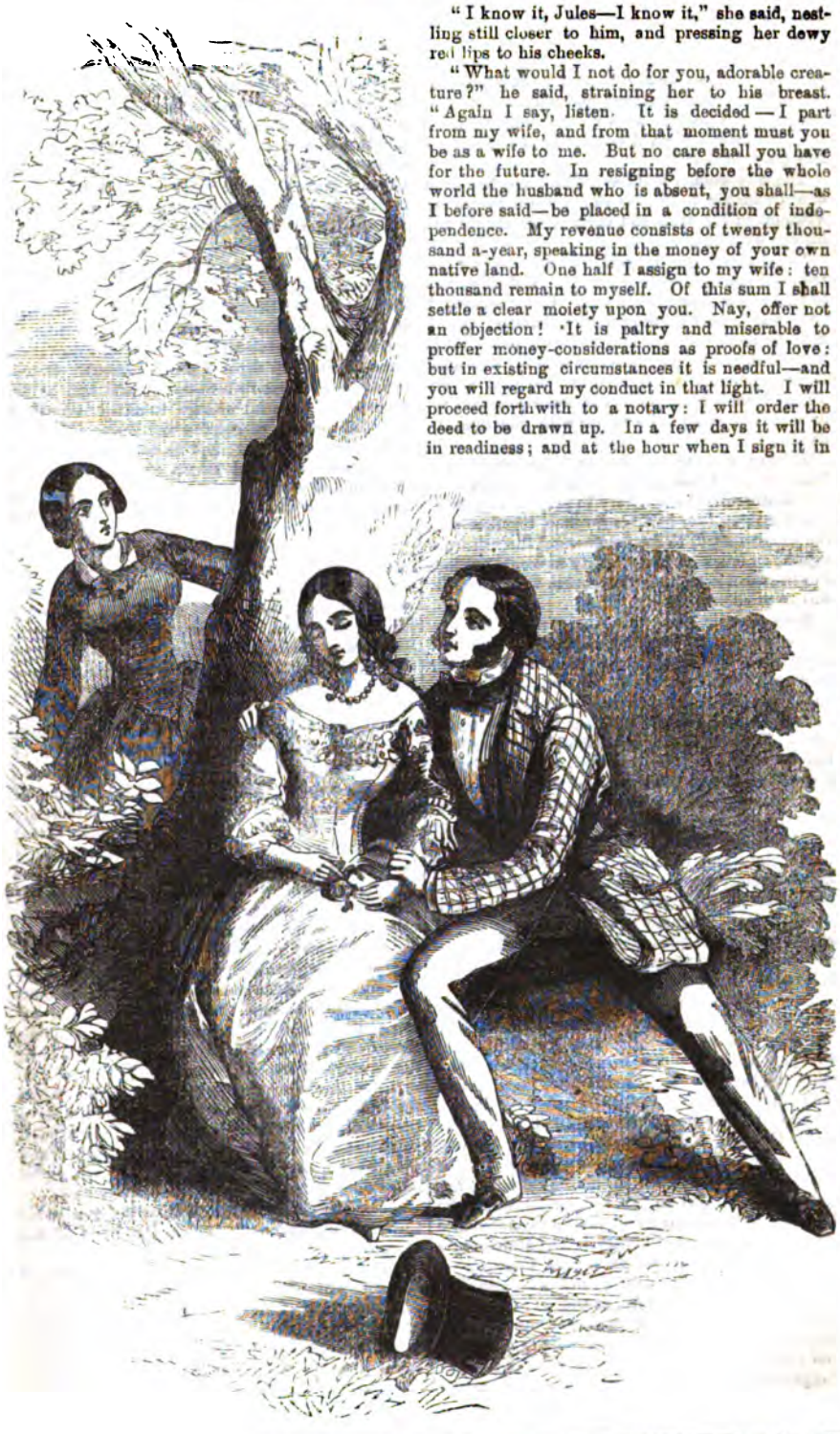
"You have something in your mind?" he said: "speak—what is it? Have I not sworn to be as a husband unto you?—wherefore need you care for him who is absent? Have I not vowed to be a father for your expected babe?—what anxiety, then, can you entertain for the future welfare of your as yet unborn child? Speak, Augusta—speak candidly!"

"Oh! it is all this," she murmured, forcing tears from her eyes, "which troubles me and makes me wretched. It is only when you are with me that I am happy: because *then* I forget everything—the virtuous past—the guilty present—the uncertain future! But when I am alone, a thousand terrors haunt me. I have a husband who is rich, and under whose care neither myself nor my expected offspring need ever tremble at the idea of want. It is not even now too late for me to take a step which will still leave me in that state of confidence! My husband need not know that I have been guilty—that I have dishonoured him: these people here are bribable; and you, as a man of honour, would never breathe to a soul what has taken place between us. But I must fly hence—I must see you no more!"

"Oh, wherefore this language?" exclaimed the Viscount: "what have I done to deserve it? You apprehend poverty——Good heavens! am I not far richer than your husband, from all that you have told me? and can I not at any moment place you in a state of independence? Ah, I comprehend!—your fears are natural, as the world goes; though in respect to me, they are not just. You fancy that my love may cool——"

"Remember, my dear Jules," interrupted the syren, murmuringly, "the love of man is different from that of a woman. A woman may conceive a sudden passion, and yet cling to it devotedly for all the rest of her life-time: but a man who loves suddenly, grows cool suddenly——"

"Augusta, I swear that you do me wrong!" ejaculated the Viscount de Chateauneuf. "The passion I have experienced for you, has become interwoven with the very fibres and principles of my entire being. But it is my aim and my duty to ensure your happiness——Oh! full well do I appreciate the immensity of the sacrifice which you have already made for me, but which has still to be consummated! Now listen, Augusta; and you shall have proof that I love you—you shall have proof too that I am an honourable man!"



"I know it, Jules—I know it," she said, nestling still closer to him, and pressing her dewy red lips to his cheeks.

"What would I not do for you, adorable creature?" he said, straining her to his breast. "Again I say, listen. It is decided — I part from my wife, and from that moment must you be as a wife to me. But no care shall you have for the future. In resigning before the whole world the husband who is absent, you shall—as I before said—be placed in a condition of independence. My revenue consists of twenty thousand a-year, speaking in the money of your own native land. One half I assign to my wife: ten thousand remain to myself. Of this sum I shall settle a clear moiety upon you. Nay, offer not an objection! It is paltry and miserable to proffer money-considerations as proofs of love: but in existing circumstances it is needful—and you will regard my conduct in that light. I will proceed forthwith to a notary: I will order the deed to be drawn up. In a few days it will be in readiness; and at the hour when I sign it in

your presence, must you renounce your husband—renounce every family tie, if need be—and become wholly and unconditionally mine! From that hour too shall we dwell together, wheresoever your inclination may suggest that we fix our abode: and we shall be as husband and wife. But now, Augusta, not another word on this subject! not a remonstrance! I am determined: it is a duty—and I will fulfil it!"

The wily woman could well afford a perfect gush of enthusiastic feeling as she strained the young Viscount in her arms and covered his cheeks and his lips with kisses.

"And now I go," he said, "at once to give the requisite instructions to a notary. I shall return to pass a few hours with you. Unfortunately I have guests this evening at the chateau; and I must be there——inasmuch as for the present it is better I should keep upon terms with my wife until all arrangements be carried out. So that at six o'clock I shall be compelled to leave you: but to-morrow I promise to be earlier with you than to-day."

Having embraced Augusta Chesterfield, the Viscount de Chateauneuf took his departure to give instructions to a notary to prepare two deeds—one making over half his revenue, together with the chateau itself, to Stephanie—and the other assigning so much of his property as would produce five thousand a-year, to the woman with whom he was so profoundly infatuated.

Soon after six o'clock in the evening, the Viscountess de Chateauneuf commenced her toilet for the party. One of her maids, on ascending to her mistress's chamber to render the wonted assistance, gave her the pleasing intelligence that the Viscount had just entered and was likewise gone to dress. Thus Stephanie was relieved from her fears lest he should not be punctual. A little before seven they met in the drawing-room; and for the first few moments the Viscount was troubled and embarrassed, as he thought that in a few days he was to deal a blow fatal to the happiness of the unfortunate and confiding wife who now greeted him with such sweet smiles. This feeling rendered him unusually kind, and even affectionate towards her:—at least his manner had the appearance of affection; and Stephanie was radiant with happiness, as she said to herself, "Yes, he loves me—he loves me! How could I ever have doubted it?"

In a few minutes the guests began to arrive—some fifteen or sixteen in all; and amongst them the Marquis of Villebelle and Constance. The Marquis had within the last few days received a much higher and far more lucrative appointment than that which he had held at the Court of Madrid: he was now to be accredited as Minister to the Court of Naples—but he had still leave of absence for a few weeks ere setting out for his new post. Being prosperous in his worldly circumstances and blessed in his love for Constance, he was supremely happy; and his fine countenance reflected the feelings of his heart. The Marchioness of Villebelle—for so we must call Constance—looked eminently beautiful; and she also was happy in her Etienne's love, as well as in the contemplation of the honours bestowed upon him by the King, and which his own talents had won. But still the felicity of Lady Saxondale's younger daughter was not complete: inasmuch as she had for some time past been troubled and anxious on account of those relatives who were so dear to her. She had heard of the terrific exposure which took place a few months back at Saxondale Castle, when the double wedding was so strangely interrupted and broken off: she knew therefore that her sister Juliana was thoroughly and irredeemably disgraced, and that her mother's name had suffered at the same time in the estimation of the world. She likewise knew that her mother and Juliana were not now together—that the former was in England, and the latter somewhere upon the Continent; and she was grieved that her sister suffered her not to become acquainted with the place of seclusion to which she had retired. Constance was also aware that her brother Edmund had married the Baroness de Charlemont who was tried for the murder of her first husband;—and all these circumstances were sufficient to depress her somewhat. Nevertheless, her husband's love—so sincere and so devoted—was powerful enough to mitigate much of that full amount of grief which she would otherwise have experienced; and no one, as she entered the brilliantly lighted saloon at the Viscount de Chateauneuf's mansion, would have suspected that the felicity of the Marchioness of Villebelle was thus alloyed.

We will pass over all details in respect to the sumptuous banquet which was served up: let our readers suppose it to be over, and the company dispersed about the suite of gilded and brilliantly lighted saloons thrown open for their reception. There was music in one: in another the tables were spread with splendidly bound volumes and prints: in a third the card tables were set out; and the fourth opened upon a spacious winter-garden, or conservatory of glass, heated by artificial means, and containing a varied selection of the choicest plants as well as of several fruit-trees from the tropics. The Viscountess de Chateauneuf and the Marchioness of Villebelle, who had already conceived a friendship for each other, were seated together upon a sofa in the music-room: a young lady was at the piano—another at the harp: others were sitting with young gentlemen, and listening to the melody, or perhaps whispering with each other: the elderly gentlemen and ladies were in the card-room: in short, all the company were agreeably occupied in some way or another. The Marquis of Villebelle had accompanied the Viscount de Chateauneuf into the conservatory; and for some little time they were engaged in examining the exotics and the fruits of the palm, the banana, the citron, and the orange trees.

"My dear Viscount," said the Marquis, when the inspection was concluded, "you and I have known each other since our boyhood; and though there has been an interval of some years since last we saw each other, yet is the friendly feeling of other times in no way diminished on my part."

"Nor on mine, my dear Villebelle," responded Chateauneuf, warmly grasping the hand of the Marquis.

"I am sure of it," resumed the latter; "and therefore you will not think it strange or impertinent that I am about to speak to you on a certain subject. In a word, my dear friend, you are not happy: and if there be any circumstance in which you require the counsel or consolation of one who experiences a sincere regard for you——"

"But wherefore, Villebelle," interrupted the Viscount, "do you think that I am unhappy?"

"I know it," was the response given by the Marquis. "When I met you the other day in company with the Viscountess,—although we were only a brief ten minutes together,—I nevertheless saw that you had moments of abstraction, and that your mind seemed to be wandering to other subjects far different from those which had arisen in conversation. After we separated, my wife observed to me that she thought you had something darkening your soul. To-day, my dear Chateauneuf, I have observed the same manner on your part. My experiences of the world have been somewhat severe; and its teachings have enabled me to catch at a glance the slightest evidences of unhappiness in those with whom I come in contact. Think not for a moment that I seek to penetrate, through mere impertinent curiosity, into your affairs: but there have been times in my life when I should have hailed the counsel and the solace of a true and sincere friend as something as welcome as an angel-visit. I am your friend, Chateauneuf; and that is the reason I am thus speaking."

The Viscount bent down his eyes, and reflected profoundly for more than a minute. He was too intelligent not to be perfectly aware how very serious a step he had resolved to take, in renouncing his wife for the sake of Mrs. Chesterfield; and though very far from entertaining the idea of retracing his way, or revoking the preliminaries which he had that morning initiated with the notary,—yet it occurred to him that it was altogether a matter on which he really ought to consult friendly advice. The notary himself had strongly urged him to adopt this course; and though Jules, in his infatuation for Augusta, had impatiently rejected the legal gentleman's counsel at the time, —it now recurred to him with added force, in consequence of the observations made by Villebelle.

"I do not know," he said, abruptly breaking silence, and raising his eyes as suddenly, "that I am unhappy——In one sense I am the happiest of men——"

"You ought to be," said the Marquis. "You possess ample revenues—a fine position—a beautiful, amiable, and affectionate wife——But, ah! I hope that I have said nothing indiscreet?" he ejaculated, perceiving that a cloud came over the handsome countenance of the young Viscount.

"My dear friend," said the latter, taking the hand of the Marquis and pressing it with a sort of convulsive force, "you have indeed touched a true chord, though not in the manner you intended or supposed. I said that in one sense I was the happiest of men; and I meant that I am thus happy in possessing the love of one of the most adorable of women. But this, Villebelle," added the Viscount, lowering his voice, to a scarcely audible whisper,—"this is not my wife!"

The Marquis was amazed: for with all his experience of the world, and with all his penetration, he had failed to discern that the Viscountess de Chateauneuf possessed not her husband's love.

"Yes—it is as I tell you," continued the Viscount, having glanced around to assure himself that they were alone together in the conservatory. "My wife is as nothing to me: my mistress is everything. The former makes me wretched: the latter is the source of all happiness. Ah, my dear friend! you cannot read the real disposition of women by merely beholding them at the dinner-table, or in the midst of brilliant society. Doubtless I have my faults:—but who has not? Stephanie has however ten thousand times more failings than myself. Do not misunderstand me! The snow is not purer than her chastity as a wife; but I speak of infirmities of temper which are but too well calculated to make a household unhappy and drive a man to distraction. Regarded individually, each perhaps is an airy nothing; but aggravated —accumulated—taken together, they constitute an insupportable tyranny. One single drop of water falling on the stone, makes no impression; but the constant dripping wears it away. A single blow upon the head, does little harm beyond the transient pain: but a continuous succession of blows produces madness. Thus is it with those infirmities of temper to which I have alluded: and now do you comprehend me?"

"I understand and I am astonished," replied the Marquis of Villebelle. "I am sorry that I should have turned the conversation in a manner to evolve such a topic,—a topic invested with the solemn sanctity of a family secret."

"Do not be sorry on that account, my dear Villebelle," replied Chateauneuf: "I am glad that you have thus spoken. I do indeed require a friend: for I am about to take a step of paramount importance——nothing less than separating from my wife!"

The Marquis of Villebelle looked deeply concerned, as indeed he was. He needed not to ask the question whether the Viscountess was as yet aware of her husband's intention; for he felt assured that she was not. He therefore experienced an illimitable compassion for that young lady, who was evidently lulled into the security of her own love—cradled in the confidence of her own affection—unsuspicious of the storm which was gathering above her head. He was concerned, too, on account of his friend Jules de Chateauneuf: for he could not but consider that it was indeed a fearful step that he had resolved upon taking.

"Yes," continued the Viscount, "I am determined——unless indeed you show me good reason to induce me to alter my resolve. A man is bound to consult his own happiness: he must not sacrifice it for the sake of one woman, when it can be ensured by another,—although the former bear the more sacred title of wife, and the latter be in the false position of a mistress. Such is my case: —can you therefore blame me? I shall not act dishonourably in financial matters with regard to Stephanie. Though none of her fortune is by deed settled upon herself, I purpose to give her half; and a moiety of my own half shall I settle on my mistress. This is what I have promised the latter: and indeed, I have already instructed a notary to draw up the requisite deeds."

"Jules de Chateauneuf," said the Marquis of Villebelle, addressing his friend in a solemn voice and with a grave countenance, "you have done well to consult me in this instance. You have brought yourself to the edge of a precipice: for God's sake, let mine be the hand which is to draw you back! You must reflect—this resolve which you have adopted in madness, must be renounced in the hour of sober deliberation. What! for some of those little peculiarities of temper which no women

"Yes—those were indeed days of pleasing pain," said Constance; and she hastily passed her kerchief across her countenance: for the retrospect had conjured up certain associations with regard to her mother, her brother, and her sister.

"Do not weep, my beloved wife," said the Marquis, drawing his chair closer to that in which she was seated; and taking her hand he pressed it warmly—while he gazed with tender devotion upon the countenance over which the shade of sadness had come. "No happiness can be perfect, Constance, in this world. There are always some drawbacks; and we must accept with gratitude the amount of felicity which we do experience. Only conceive how infinitely superior is our condition, to that of a wedded couple who enjoy not each other's love, and know not therefore the charms of sweetest domesticity!"

"Yes—I am not unmindful of all that," answered Constance, thanking her husband with an affectionate look for the attempt which he thus made to console and cheer her. "Nevertheless, you must admit, Etienne, that it would indicate hardness of heart if I did not feel the calamities which have overtaken my family. My mother disgraced—her name become a bye-word in the society which she once adorned—convicted of having propagated a serious calumny in respect to Mr. Deveril;—Edmund having made such a shocking match;—Juliana I know not where—but she, alas! disgraced likewise——Oh, Etienne! promise me, promise me, my beloved husband, that if ever you obtain the slightest hint as to where my unhappy sister has secreted herself, you will tell me—that I may fly to her—that I may console her! For I am sure that whatever her faults may have been, you would not debar me from the performance of such a duty?"

"No, dearest Constance—not for a moment would I!" exclaimed the Marquis; "and you will not even require my solemn promise that if accident should render me acquainted with the seclusion to which your unfortunate sister has fled, I would not lose a moment in revealing it to you."

"A word from your lips, dearest Etienne," responded Constance, "has ever the sanctity of the most solemn vow. Yes—I know that you would not for an instant hesitate to let me see my sister, if you by any chance obtained tidings concerning her. But we will now talk on other subjects: I must not be sad and gloomy when in your society."

"No," rejoined the Marquis; "because my happiness depends upon your's. And now, Constance, I have to inform you that at twelve o'clock I am going somewhere with the Viscount de Chateauneuf. It is to carry out that experiment to which I have alluded. I shall tell you nothing more now: have patience, my beloved one, until my return. You need not fear that I shall be very long absent."

But in the meanwhile, let us see what the Viscount de Chateauneuf was doing elsewhere. This young nobleman was much struck by the remarks and remonstrances of his friend Villebelle at the time the discourse was taking place in the conservatory: but when he awoke in the morning, the effect thereof was much deadened. We cannot say that it had altogether passed away,—because Jules de Chateauneuf was too intelligent and likewise possessed of feelings naturally too good, not to have experienced, even after the lapse of some hours, the lingering influence of Villebelle's impressive language. But he was still as much infatuated as ever with Augusta Chesterfield: her image, which was uppermost in his mind, was full of a ravishing beauty; and he said to himself that such a woman was worth making any sacrifice for. Nevertheless, he preserved a certain degree of kindness of manner towards Stephanie at the breakfast-table; and he studiously avoided taking offence at anything which she said. He moreover faithfully kept the promise which he had given to the Marquis of Villebelle, and hinted not a single syllable of the intentions which he harboured in respect to a separation. The Viscountess, finding him more gentle towards her—more lenient—more tolerant—secretly flattered herself that a favourable change had taken place within him; and she lost no opportunity of lavishing upon him the evidences of her sincere love. Even during the ordinary routine of the breakfast-table and the accompanying conversation, there are a myriad little ways by which a fond and adoring woman can display her tenderness for the beloved one: looks, and words, and attentions, all may be rendered available for this purpose. And so it was with the Viscountess on the present occasion; and more than once Jules de Chateauneuf was compelled to admit to himself that the affection his wife cherished for him was deep, tender, and sincere.

It was about half-past ten o'clock when he issued forth from his mansion to pay the accustomed visit to Augusta; and he set out thus early, according to the promise made her on the preceding day. On reaching the little villa, he found Mrs. Chesterfield expecting his arrival; and she welcomed him with the usual amount of blandishments, caresses, and smiles,—all lavishly given and rapturously received. Again did he seek in his own mind to contrast the fervid endearments of Augusta with the more ingenuous and unsophisticated evidences of his wife's affection: but the comparison he drew was favourable to the former. He sought to persuade himself that there was something insipid and mawkishly sentimental in the love of Stephanie—while the ardent caresses of his mistress filled his soul with an almost frenzied passion. It was a complete infatuation under which he laboured in respect to Mrs. Chesterfield: it was a devouring, furious, storm-like whirl of passion through which, by her blandishments and the gorgeous splendour of her voluptuous beauty, she had the power to hurry him.

"Dearest Augusta," he said, in the course of conversation, "I have a great favour to ask you."

"There is no favour, beloved Jules, that you can demand at my hands," responded the syren, "which I am not prepared to grant. Name it. Is it some new proof of my devoted love which you require?"

"No—scarcely that," answered the Viscount. "I will explain myself in a few words. Yesterday I met a friend, a certain M. Maurice, who was a schoolfellow of mine—a gentleman of wealth and standing; and he dined with me last evening. Remember, Augusta, he is one of my oldest acquaintances; and we entertain a very sincere

friendship for each other. I sought an opportunity to speak to him alone, of old reminiscences —those school-boy days which it is sometimes so pleasant to look back upon; and the discourse, by a natural transition, turned upon the present circumstances of each of us. Your image was uppermost in my mind: I longed to eulogize you to my friend. I could not resist the opportunity: my heart was so full of love and devotion for you that it needed a vent for its feelings. Besides, it is so sweet to confide to the ear of friendship all that one experiences in respect to so strong a passion. M. Meurice was rejoiced to hear that I am so blessed in your love: he is no straight-laced, sanctimonious individual who would take the wife's part and chide the faithless husband. In short, he entered into all my feelings: for *he* likewise has loved passionately and fondly; and he could appreciate the gushing enthusiasm with which I spoke. Now, dearest Augusta, the favour I ask at your hands, is that you will permit me to introduce my friend to you presently."

"I cannot," she answered, "have the slightest objection after the arrangements which were solemnly entered into between us yesterday. Had not those arrangements been made, I should chide you, Jules, for the proposal to present any one who might hereafter meet me with my husband and make me blush at the recognition. But inasmuch as it is agreed that I am to renounce my husband——"

"Yes—for my sake," quickly responded the enamoured Viscount. "In a few days all will be settled; and there can consequently be no harm in your receiving this bosom-friend of mine."

"Assuredly not," rejoined Mrs. Chesterfield. "Any friend of your's, Jules, will ever be most welcome to me."

"And you will apparel yourself, dearest," whispered the Viscount, tenderly and coaxingly, "in your most becoming dress: for though you are lovely and adorable in any garb, yet would I have you set off your splendid charms to the utmost advantage, that you may in every way shine so as to justify my taste in the eyes of my friend."

"Fear not, Jules," answered Augusta: "my appearance will be worthy of your love."

"I must now leave you therefore," added the Viscount: "for I have promised to fetch M. Meurice at mid-day. He is staying at an hotel in Paris: and by one o'clock at latest we shall be with you."

Jules de Chateauneuf embraced his mistress tenderly—and issued forth from the villa. In order to keep his amour hitherto as secret as possible, he had never used his own carriage, nor been attended on horseback by any one of his grooms, on the occasion of his visits to the villa; and therefore he was now compelled to take a public vehicle to proceed to Paris—which however was only about a couple or three miles distant. He reached the hotel where the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle were staying, precisely at mid-day; and having paid his respects to Constance, he took her husband, who was in readiness, away with him. He could not help noticing that when the Marquis left his wife—though it was only for a few hours —he embraced her; and the spectacle of this connubial bliss caused a pang of remorse to shoot through the heart of the young Viscount. He even sighed; and the sound fell not unnoticed upon the ear of his friend, who was secretly rejoiced at this proof that all the better feelings of the Viscount's soul were not completely deadened within him.

"You doubtless consider me uxorious to a degree?" observed the Marquis, as he took his seat by the side of the Viscount in the hackney-coach, which immediately rolled away from the hotel. "But I assured you last night that I regard my wife with the tenderest and sincerest affection."

"And may you always be happy in this love of your's," observed Jules: but afraid that his friend would seize the opportunity to lecture him on his conduct in respect to Stephanie, he hastened to give the conversation a dexterous turn, by observing, "If I mistake not, you told me last night that the Marchioness is the daughter of an English peeress named Lady Saxondale? I was not struck by the name at the time: but after you were gone, I bethought myself that it was not altogether unfamiliar to me. Is there not a nobleman of that name?"

"There is," answered Villebelle, in a very serious manner. "He is my wife's brother; and I regret to say that he has contracted a most foolish alliance——"

"Ah, I remember!" ejaculated the Viscount. "The Baroness de Charlemont! Pardon me for having touched upon a topic which can be by no means agreeable——"

"There is no need for apology, my dear friend," interrupted the Marquis. "It is a circumstance which I deplore on the part of one so nearly connected with my beloved wife: but it is not a topic to be avoided in shame on my own account."

"Assuredly not," responded Chateauneuf. "How was it possible that Lord Saxondale could have made such a match?"

"Doubtless he became infatuated with that artful and designing woman," responded Villebelle. "Ah, Jules! there are women of this kind in the world—women who insidiously weave their chains of silk and gold around the too susceptible heart——"

"True! there are such women," exclaimed the Viscount, again solicitous to divert the conversation into another channel: for he more than half-suspected that Villebelle was applying these remarks to his case in respect to Augusta. "And are this Lord Saxondale and the Marchioness your wife, the only children of her ladyship?"

"No—there is another—an elder sister," replied Villebelle.

"Is she too married?" asked the Viscount, merely for the purpose of keeping the conversation away from topics which were disagreeable to himself,—although he felt convinced that when once Villebelle should have seen his Augusta, he would no longer give utterance to covert inuendoes relative to artful and designing women.

"No: Juliana Farefield—for that is the name of my wife's sister—is unmarried," returned Villebelle. "But, by the bye, have you devised some *incognito* for me to adopt?"

"Yes. You are to pass as M. Meurice; and furthermore, I have given Augusta," continued Jules, "a most excellent character in respect to the liberality of your sentiments. I have assured

her that in you she will find no straight-laced, demure, sanctimonious individual;—and therefore, my dear Villebelle, you will be upon your guard accordingly."

"Fear not, Jules," rejoined the Marquis, "that I shall in any way deport myself so as to make you regret having assented to my caprice in presenting me to Mrs. Chesterfield. Whatever opinion I may form, will be in no way shadowed forth until you and I are alone together again."

The vehicle rolled onward; and in due course stopped at the gate of the grounds in which the little villa stood. In her sitting-apartment within the walls of that villa, Mrs. Chesterfield was placed in a half-reclining attitude upon the sofa. She had apparelled herself in her handsomest morning-dress; and it was one which admirably became the style of her dark beauty. She had taken immense pains with her toilet. She knew that the passion of the Viscount would be sustained and enhanced by any encomia which his friend might pass upon her beauty; and she therefore had not failed to render herself as captivating as possible. The dress, fitting tight to the bust, developed its rich contours,—though the high corsage of a morning-garb concealed them. She wore her hair in bands; and a rich natural gloss rested upon those luxuriant masses. Her very attitude upon the sofa was studied,—a mirror opposite showing her that the position she had thus chosen was well suited to her purpose. When, therefore, she heard the vehicle stop and the gate-bell ring, she did not rise from that sofa: nor, as the sounds of footsteps, approaching the front-door from the gate, reached her ears, did she so far gratify her curiosity as to jump up and peep from the window to see what sort of a person her lover's friend might be. No: she retained her half-reclining position upon the sofa,—one well-shaped foot resting upon a hassock, and her face ready to be turned towards the door when it opened, so that the light from the casement might fall upon her features and display the aquiline beauty of her profile. She was resolved to please the Viscount's friend; and as this endeavour on the part of a woman is always attended with more or less excitement, it brought up a richer carnation tint to the delicate olive of Augusta's complexion. Another glance at the mirror was completely satisfactory; and now footsteps were ascending the stairs.

The door opened: the Viscount entered first; and he began with the proper formula for such occasions:—"Permit me to introduce——"

But he was suddenly cut short: for as the Marquis of Villebelle, immediately following, crossed the threshold, he exclaimed, "Juliana!"—and then stopped short in utter amazement.

Jules de Chateauneuf started on hearing that name—the name of the Marchioness of Villebelle's sister—the name of one, too, who the Marquis himself had during the ride assured him was unmarried!

CHAPTER CLII.

THE EXPERIMENT'S RESULT.

Yes: Augusta Chesterfield was none other than Juliana, Lady Saxondale's elder daughter! As the reader may suppose, she was seized with a perfect consternation on beholding her brother-in-law; and the thought flashed to her mind that in introducing him to her, it was a premeditated stratagem on the part of the Viscount to have her thoroughly unmasked and exposed. And this supposition was natural enough, inasmuch as Julet had assured her that the individual about to be presented bore the name of *Maurice*. The carnation tint was in a moment heightened into the deepest red on Juliana's countenance: but not a syllable—not even the slightest ejaculation—escaped her lips: she was stricken dumb by the overpowering sense of shame, astonishment, confusion, and even rage.

"Juliana!" cried the Viscount de Chateauneuf, repeating the name which had burst from the lips of the Marquis: "what is the meaning of this? Tell me, Villebelle—is it your sister-in-law?"

Then the Hon. Miss Farefield instantaneously perceived that it was no trick on her lover's part—merely some coincidence which she could not however fathom, nor had leisure to reflect upon. Starting up from the sofa, she advanced towards the Viscount,—at the same time flinging a swift but significant glance upon Villebelle, as much as to enjoin him to betray her no farther than he had already done.

"Yes, dearest Jules," she said, taking his hand, and gazing up into his countenance with all her power of fondest cajolery; "my name is indeed Juliana, and not Augusta: but in no other circumstances am I changed. The adoption of that other name was a whim and a caprice——But why do you withdraw your hand? why do you look thus coldly upon me?"

Jules de Chateauneuf, however, made no answer. An expression of anguish passed over his countenance: and turning abruptly aside, he pressed his hand to his brow, as if to steady his thoughts. The horrible idea was agitating in his mind that he was the victim and the dupe of a designing woman, and that Villebelle's ominously uttered words had become justified in their predictive reality. For all in a moment the thought had occurred to the young Viscount, that if this were Juliana Farefield—and she *unmarried*—the child that she bore in her bosom was the fruit of an illicit amour; she must therefore be a wanton, and she had sought the retirement of this villa to conceal her shame! If she had been another's with the sanctified title of a wife, it was nothing in his estimation: but if she had been another's without that title, then was she instantaneously converted into a licentious profligate—a being of gross impurity!

"For heaven's sake ruin me not with *him!*" were the hastily whispered words which Juliana breathed aside to the Marquis of Villebelle, the instant that the Viscount so abruptly turned away from her.

"Juliana," responded her brother-in-law, but also speaking in a subdued and rapid manner; "I

JULIANA

dare not mislead my friend on any account. It would be the death of his wife!"

"Etienne, I implore you," murmured Juliana, ready to sink with shame and anguish, "save me from exposure! Remember that I always favoured your suit with my sister——"

"It cuts me to the very soul to harm a hair of your head—for Constance's sake," rejoined the Marquis. "But what am I to do?"

"Villebelle!" exclaimed the Viscount de Chateauneuf, suddenly turning round at this juncture and clutching his friend by the arm—for it was evident that the young nobleman was labouring under the most painful excitement: "tell me, wherefore has your sister-in-law sought this retirement. She is in a way to become a mother: has she a husband? does he hold an Indian appointment? Tell me everything, I conjure you!"

The Marquis of Villebelle's countenance became so over-shadowed with gloom, and he looked so deeply afflicted, that the Viscount de Chateauneuf had no need to have his questions answered in words. He read the responses on his friend's features; and they were damnatory of the woman who until within the last few minutes had exercised such a fascinating power and spell-like influence over him.

"Juliana," he said, in a low and profoundly mournful voice, "I will not reproach you. I awake from a dream: but it was a dream which was delightful while it lasted—and I have to thank you for so much bliss. Happy is he who enjoys the fragrance of a flower in the ignorance that its leaves may distil poison! No: I will not reproach you! But all is at an end between us!"

"No, no!" shrieked forth Juliana. "Speak not these harsh words! It is a death-blow which you are dealing! I love you, Jules! On my soul I love you!——Heavens, he deserts me!"

The Viscount de Chateauneuf rushed precipitately from the room, in so excited a manner that he waited not even to speak another word to his friend Villebelle: nor did he pause upon the stairs to see whether this nobleman was following him. Juliana flew to the window: the Viscount was speeding towards the gate——Oh, for one look!—that she might catch his eyes—that she might passionately wave him back! But no: he turned not his regards upon her, even for a single moment!—the gate opened—he rushed through—it closed behind him: she beheld him no more!

But let not the reader fancy that Juliana really loved the Viscount with a true sincerity of passion. No such thing. She had merely been playing a deep game, in order to secure to herself a lover and a fortune,—inasmuch as she was disgraced beyond the hope of obtaining a husband, and was moreover dependent in a pecuniary sense upon her mother's purse. If she exhibited so much anguish, it was not altogether feigned: on the contrary, it was almost entirely genuine,—but not an anguish on account of a lost love; it was the anguish of disappointment and rage at finding all the fabric of her hopes thus dissipated in a single instant. Such an anguish as this lasted only so long as there was the slightest chance of bringing her victim back and regaining her empire over him: but when the garden-gate shut him out from her view, and she saw that all was lost, she grew suddenly calm.

"Etienne," she said, turning abruptly round and flinging her flashing glances at her brother-in-law, "it is you that have done this!"

"Not intentionally, Juliana!—on my soul, not intentionally!" he answered, while his looks still continued to indicate the deepest commiseration and sorrow. "Listen for a few moments while I explain——"

"There is nothing to explain," cried Juliana petulantly: "the mischief is done—you have ruined me!"

"There must be explanation," said the Marquis, "because there is accusation. I tell you, Juliana, that all this has been perfectly unintentional on my part—and that when I came hither, I had not the slightest notion of encountering you. I could not have foreseen it!"

"But wherefore," demanded Miss Farefield, "that feigned name of Meurice?"

"That feigned name of Meurice—I will explain the incident," responded the Marquis, serious and mournful alike in his tone and looks. "But be patient, Juliana—give not way to these impetuous gestures—these angry looks. The Viscount de Chateauneuf spoke to me, last night, in enthusiastic terms of a lady who had won his heart; and after some discourse it was agreed that I should be presented to her this day. Now, you can well understand that, holding a high official appointment—and for the sake of Constance likewise——"

"Oh, I comprehend!" interrupted Juliana with bitterness: "you did not choose to come under your own name to pay a visit to a kept mistress! Well," she continued, in a somewhat milder manner, "it is at all events satisfactory to know that this was not a vile trick nor a detestable stratagem, planned for my exposure."

"No!" ejaculated Villebelle: "I would not for the world aggravate whatsoever sorrows and afflictions you may have already endured! But wherefore have you kept your dwelling a secret from Constance? You must have known she was in Paris: you must have known likewise that she loves you—that she has yearned after you——"

"Etienne," interrupted Juliana vehemently, "is it not but too evident that my pathway and that of my sister lie in different directions on the broad arena of the world? You must not think that I am altogether so changed—so altered——so degraded," she added, her voice suddenly sinking as she spoke the word; and the word itself being spoken with a painful effort,—"as to be indifferent to what may be thought of me, or to be enabled to look those who know and love me, in the face without a blush. Etienne, I am unhappy: my fortunes too are desperate. You know what has happened in England: Constance likewise knows it:—and could you think I should voluntarily seek you out? No: I should only be bringing disgrace upon my sister; and I am not bad enough to do that. Being compelled to renounce the idea of obtaining a husband——But no matter! Let this interview end. Leave me!"

"But you will see Constance?" urged the Marquis. "It was only a few hours back that she was speaking of you with tears in her eyes; and she made me promise that if by any accident I should discover the place of your abode——"

"Then let Constance come to me this evening," said Juliana. "A few hours must elapse before

we meet, that I may have leisure to compose my troubled thoughts. Do not let her come until the evening. And now leave me, Etienne."

"I go, Juliana," said the Marquis: but still lingering, he added in a hesitating manner, as if fearful of offending one whose temper was naturally vehement, and now particularly ruffled,—"Is there nothing I can do for you? Tell me, Juliana—my purse is at your service——"

"Thank you—I have sufficient means for the present. My mother supplies me with funds. Ah! Etienne," she added bitterly, "with what a family have you connected yourself!—my mother's reputation itself damaged—my brother married to a murderess—myself——"

"Juliana, give not way to these reflections—at least not in such a spirit," interrupted the Marquis, deeply pained. "It is not impossible for you to experience happiness in this world. In some agreeable seclusion, and under a feigned name——"

"Enough. Leave me to chalk out my own career—to follow my own destinies! And now go, Etienne: I must be alone."

Villebelle extended his hand, which Juliana took for a moment; and as she turned abruptly away, he slowly quitted the room. On issuing forth from the villa, he found the hackney-coach still waiting in the road.

"Where is the gentleman who accompanied me?" he asked of the driver.

"Gone, sir," was the response. "He came out and rushed away like one demented."

Villebelle reflected for a few moments. He thought to himself that Jules de Chateauneuf, in a thoroughly altered state of mind, must have sped homeward to make his peace fully with his amiable and loving wife: but he longed to proceed to the mansion to assure himself that such was the fact. On the other hand, he was anxious to inform Constance that he had discovered the abode of her sister, whom she was to see in the evening: but then he reasoned that as some hours must yet elapse ere this interview could take place, Constance in the meantime would be full of anxiety and suspense, and would be asking him a thousand questions, to which he might not be able to give very satisfactory replies: for he was resolved to screen Juliana's most recent faults and frailties—those in respect to Chateauneuf—as much as possible from the Marchioness. He therefore came to the conclusion that it would be better to remain some little time absent from the hotel; and in the interval he could visit the chateau. He accordingly entered the hackney-coach, and ordered the driver to take him to the Viscount's mansion.

In a short time the Marquis of Villebelle alighted at that palatial residence; and, on inquiring of the hall-porter for the Viscount, was informed that he was in the drawing-room with the Viscountess. Villebelle's heart warmed at this intelligence, which served to confirm his previously conceived hope that the husband would now do his duty towards the tender and affectionate Stephanie. He ascended to the apartment, to which a handsomely-dressed lacquey led the way; and the instant the door was thrown open, he observed the Viscount and Viscountess seated together upon the sofa. The glance that Jules immediately flung upon him, was expressive of mingled gratitude and firmly-taken resolve,—gratitude for the part which the Marquis of Villebelle had so generously borne in the transaction, and a resolve that thenceforth he would profit by recent experiences. As a matter of course, Villebelle assumed the air of one who was merely paying an ordinary visit, and came for no special purpose; because he naturally concluded that the Viscount had not explained to his wife a single detail of the circumstances which had thus induced him to seek her presence at a time when he was wont to be absent from her. The Marquis saw that Stephanie was completely happy; and during half-an-hour's conversation, he likewise perceived that the Viscount treated her with a kindness which was truly affectionate, without being so overstrained as to excite her suspicion that it was the result of no ordinary occurrences. When Villebelle rose to take his departure, Jules de Chateauneuf accompanied him from the room; and leading him into another, embraced him with the most grateful warmth.

"Through you, Villebelle," exclaimed Jules, "I have been wakened from the most delusive of dreams. Your's indeed is the hand which has snatched me back from the brink of a precipice!—you have saved me from consummating towards my wife an outrage which I should full soon have been compelled bitterly to repent. Ah! when I ere now broke away from the presence of that guileful syren, it was with a sudden springing up of the tenderest yearning towards Stephanie. All her good qualities seemed to crowd in upon my convictions in a moment: they blazed as it were upon my mental view—they made me comprehend what a treasure I possessed in her, and how infamously I had been about to sacrifice her!"

"My dear friend," answered Villebelle, "you know not the pleasure it affords me in hearing you thus speak. Ah! Jules, it would have indeed been something to be deeply deplored, if a noble heart such as your's naturally is, had been ruined by an infatuation."

"I am an altered man," replied the Count: "a veil has fallen from my eyes—and in the same moment that the character of one woman was exposed in its darkness, that of another was revealed in its brightness. Yes—I am an altered man; and perhaps it is fortunate that all this should have taken place. Hitherto I had not loved Stephanie—now I feel that I can adore her: hitherto her demonstrations of tenderness had appeared to me insipid and of school-girl mawkishness—henceforth they will constitute the greatest charms of my existence. Oh! I feel, my dear friend, that there are moments in a man's life when it requires some startling incident to arouse him into a due appreciation of what is good, and what is virtuous, and what is beautiful,—at the same time that he is snatched from the midst of delusions, falsities, and artificialities. To you am I indebted for all that has occurred; and rest assured, Villebelle, that whensoever you set foot within these walls, you will henceforth be enabled to contemplate a scene of connubial bliss as perfect as that which you yourself enjoy."

The two noblemen were melted to tears: they grasped each other's hands—Jules with the fervour of gratitude, Etienne in the warmth of congratulation: and thus for the present did they separate.

The Marquis of Villebelle, re-entering the hackney-coach, was driven back to Paris; and on ascending to his apartments in the hotel, he found Constance awaiting his return. She was employing her leisure in finishing the portrait of Stephanie; and her husband, immediately perceiving in what work she had been engaged, as she threw down her pencil on his appearance, embraced her,—saying, "When that portrait is finished, Constance, you shall send it to my friend Jules, who will appreciate it as that of a wife whom he has at last been brought to understand and to love."

"Then your experiment has succeeded, Etienne!" exclaimed the delighted young lady; "and I am rejoiced on Stephanie's account—yes, and on that of her husband likewise. But sit down, and give me the promised explanations."

"A few words will suffice," responded the Marquis. "Last evening, Jules made certain confessions to me, by which I found that he had become infatuated by the syren charms of another. From all that he said, I felt convinced he was in the power of a designing woman; and you will not be angry with me, Constance, when I state that in order to save my friend, I was resolved to see this female—inasmuch as I knew that I could judge of her without the bias which set like a spell on the mind of the Viscount. It was arranged that he should introduce me to her to-day. It has been done; and the result is the complete severance of the two—the breaking off of a connexion which so nearly proved fatal to his happiness—and the opening of his eyes to the full understanding of his wife's affectionate disposition. You are not angry, dearest Constance——"

"Angry, Etienne!" she exclaimed eagerly and half reproachfully: "how can I be angry with you? You have acted as a friend to a friend; and by *this* do I signify my approval!"—at the same time imprinting a kiss upon his cheek.

"And now, dearest Constance," said the Marquis, "I have to speak to you on a matter altogether different—and—and—totally unconnected with the other topic. You remember the solemn promise——"

"Juliana!" exclaimed Constance: "you have met her?"

"Accident has revealed to me her abode——"

"And you have seen her?" cried the younger sister vehemently.

"Yes—I have seen her—and I have promised that you also shall see her."

"At once!" cried the Marchioness, starting up from her seat by her husband's side: "let me hasten at once to embrace Juliana!"

"Calm yourself," said the Marquis: "it is not until the evening that you are to call upon her."

"And why not? wherefore this delay?" exclaimed Constance, cruelly disappointed.

"It is her wish. She was overpowered at the thought of meeting you again, under altered circumstances——"

"And tell me, Etienne—is she happy? But no—she cannot be—it is impossible——Alas, my poor sister!"

Constance burst into tears; and Villebelle did all he could to console her. He had dreaded lest it should strike her that Juliana was the syren of whom he had spoken as the beguiler of Jules de Chateauneuf; and he was happy to perceive that his wife entertained not this suspicion. No: for Constance would have thought, if the idea had struck her at all, that her husband could scarcely have been so guarded; and that by some look or word, he would have betrayed the fact of that identity. Her impression therefore was that it was a mere coincidence, his having fallen in with Juliana at the same time he was bent on his generous purpose on behalf of Chateauneuf.

It was about six o'clock in the evening that the Marquis and Marchioness proceeded in a carriage to the village of Auteuil. It was not Villebelle's intention to accompany Constance into Juliana's presence: he thought that the two sisters would rather be alone at such an interview. He therefore intimated to his wife that he purposed to remain for her in the carriage,—at the same time giving her to understand that she need not abridge her visit to Juliana on that account.

The vehicle stopped at the gate of the villa: the bell was rung—and Madame Durand herself came forth. She had evidently received her instructions from Juliana: for in answer to the inquiry of the Marquis, she immediately said, "The lady is gone: she departed two or three hours back."

"Gone!" ejaculated Constance, in a tone of anguish. "But she has left some letter—some message——"

"Yes—this letter," answered Madame Durand, presenting a sealed note at the same time.

Constance tore it open; and by the light of the lamp at the gateway, she read the following lines:—

"Do not be angry with me, dearest sister, that I have resolved not to meet you at present. The circumstances under which we should thus encounter each other, would be too painful for me. Mistrust not however the love that I bear for you:—and may you be happy! I go into some other seclusion, afar from Paris—and whence in a short time I will write to you. By the date at which you will reach Naples—as I see by the newspapers when you are likely to be there—you shall find a letter awaiting you. Farewell, dearest sister; and remember me kindly to the Marquis.

"JULIANA."

It was with sad and mournful feelings that Constance accompanied her husband back to the hotel at Paris: but probably his impression was that under all circumstances it was better Juliana should have adopted such a course.

CHAPTER CLIII.

THE PURSUER AND THE FUGITIVES.

THREE weeks had now elapsed since the liberation of Lord Saxondale from Dr. Ferney's house in Conduit Street, Hanover Square. The physician, on discovering the flight of the young nobleman at an early hour on the ensuing morning, had sped off to Saxondale House to acquaint her ladyship with the circumstance, and to assure her that he himself was perfectly innocent of any connivance in the matter. Lady Saxondale was at first stupified: for she saw at a glance what an immense advantage the incident would give her daughter-

in-law Adelaide, in case Edmund should return to his wife and in all things make common cause with her. Her ladyship did not reproach Dr. Ferney: she knew his character too well not to be at once convinced that he gave her the right version of Edmund's escape,—the evidence being that it was effected by some person or persons entering the house in the night. But even without such evidence, Lady Saxondale was well aware that the physician would not deceive her—and that if even altering his mind, and refusing any longer to keep Edmund a prisoner, he would deal candidly with her.

That the Count de St. Gerard had by some means succeeded in tracing out the place to which Edmund was removed, and that through this young nobleman's intervention her son had been rescued from confinement, Lady Saxondale did not doubt. But little it mattered by whom or by what means the release was effected, since the mischief was done; and Lady Saxondale was not the woman to lose valuable time in speculations on that point, nor in vain regrets when some positive mode of action was required. For if the reader will bear in mind those explanations which were given at the time when Lady Saxondale and her daughter-in-law were first brought together, it will speedily become evident that the fact of Edmund being at liberty, materially altered all her ladyship's plans, and placed her in a more perilous position than ever. She could not now institute a suit in the Ecclesiastical Courts for the annulment of her son's marriage with the Baroness de Charlemont,—inasmuch as by obtaining from the guardians a written guarantee to allow Adelaide two thousand a-year, and by assigning to her the castle in Lincolnshire as her abiding-place, a virtual recognition of that alliance had been given. What, therefore, was Lady Saxondale's position? Just this:—that in about a year and a half Edmund would come of age—she would be reduced to a mere cypher, having no farther control over the immense revenues of the house of Saxondale—having no right even, unless with his permission, to set foot across the threshold of either the mansion in Park Lane or the Lincolnshire country-seat—reduced to a jointure of some three thousand a-year—and what would be worse than all, compelled to behold her daughter-in-law Adelaide, whom she hated, occupying the high place which she herself had so long enjoyed! This was the position to which Lady Saxondale would find herself reduced,—unless by fresh machinations she could contrive to get her son Edmund completely into her power, and obtain the fullest and completest influence over him.

All these matters were duly weighed and considered by Lady Saxondale immediately on receiving the intelligence of her son's escape: or rather, we should say, so soon afterwards as she could compose herself for such serious and painful meditation. But it was not very long ere her ladyship became sufficiently tranquillised to envisage her position calmly; and her resolves were speedily taken.

She sent at once for Lord Harold Staunton, and addressed him in the following manner:—

"Edmund has escaped: it is of the utmost consequence that he should be again got into my power. For this purpose I am about to leave London. Do you on your part lose no time in getting that woman Madge Somers away from Deveril's house. You and I, Harold, have now each to play a part upon which much depends; you must not sleep over your work, as I assuredly shall not be caught slumbering at mine. My belief is that Edmund has gone to rejoin his wife, who is in Lincolnshire. Thither shall I proceed under circumstances of becoming caution: but if it be necessary, I will write to you. At all events lose no time in carrying out that which you have undertaken to perform; and if it should transpire that Edmund has remained in London, and accident should throw him in your way, do your best to renew all your former intimacy with him—worm yourself into his confidence—make yourself necessary to him,—you know how to do it,—and then we shall determine what future measures to adopt."

Lord Harold Staunton,—who was once again entirely enmeshed in the trammels which his own self-interest as well as his passion for Lady Saxondale wove around him,—promised full compliance with her injunctions; and assured her that so soon as his arrangements could be accomplished, he would make the attempt to get Madge Somers away from Deveril's house. Lady Saxondale then set off privately into Lincolnshire,—travelling by a post-chaise without any attendants, and under an assumed name. On her arrival in the county where the castle was situated, she would not go to Gainsborough, as she was too well known there; and she calculated that if Edmund had really rejoined his wife at the castle, they would both be upon the alert and would not fail to take measures for obtaining prompt information in case new dangers should threaten. Therefore Lady Saxondale went to Lincoln; and thence she despatched a person to make inquiries privately and cautiously in the neighbourhood of the castle to ascertain whether Edmund and Adelaide were resident there. The emissary returned to Lincoln, with the intelligence that Lord Saxondale had been to the castle—that he only stayed there an hour or two—and then departed with his wife. They were attended only by Adelaide's own maid; and no one at the castle knew whither they had gone.

Lady Saxondale was much annoyed at these tidings: for she had no great difficulty in fathoming the plans of her son and her daughter-in-law—and she knew that however silly and thoughtless he might be, his wife was an astute and cunning creature, who would give him the best counsel and adopt the most fitting measures to enable him to baffle any fresh designs against his liberty.

"Doubtless," said Lady Saxondale to herself, "they will seek some profound seclusion, where they hope to remain undiscovered and unmolested until Edmund shall be of age and then become his own master. Perhaps they may go upon the Continent?—and that will render matters all the more difficult for me to disentangle. But I am not to be beaten: and now the first thing to be done, is to get if possible upon the track which they took when so stealthily and hurriedly leaving the castle."

As they were no longer at the castellated mansion, there was nothing to prevent Lady Saxondale herself from proceeding thither; and accordingly the domestics were much astonished when she sud-

denly arrived in a post-chaise, unattended and alone. It was not however Lady Saxondale's purpose to tarry for any length of time at the castle: she immediately instituted inquiries amongst the servants in respect to the mode of Lord Saxondale's departure with his wife. She learnt that it was about one in the afternoon, three days previously, that he had arrived there in a post-chaise, which was immediately dismissed—that having been closeted for about an hour with Adelaide, he had given instructions for the carriage to be got in readiness—and that the equipage had borne him, his wife, and the maid, to Gainsborough, whence it had been sent back from the hotel at which they had halted in that town.

Armed with this information, to Gainsborough did Lady Saxondale forthwith repair; and continuing her inquiries, she ascertained that the fugitives had departed in a post-chaise for Chesterfield. Once upon the track, Lady Saxondale was determined not to abandon it; and she accordingly continued her travels. For several days did she thus journey, tracing the fugitives from Chester to Derby—from Derby to Shrewsbury—from Shrewsbury into Montgomeryshire: and there the trail was lost. Notwithstanding the minuteness and the unwearied perseverance with which her inquiries were followed up, she was thrown completely off the scent. But inasmuch as she had reached a point where the clue suddenly ceased, she came to the conclusion that those whom she sought were not very far distant. Perhaps they had settled somewhere in that part of Wales? At all events, she ceased to fear that they had gone abroad: for if such had been their intention, they would not have come in a direction diametrically opposite to the sea-ports whence the Continent was to be attained—unless indeed, fearing pursuit, they had thus come out of their way to throw the pursuers completely out. But despite the probability of such a proceeding, especially as Edmund was now advised by one so shrewd and cunning as Adelaide, —Lady Saxondale clung to the belief that they had located themselves somewhere in Wales.

Altogether three weeks had elapsed since the escape of the young nobleman from Dr. Ferney's house: and it was the commencement of the dark gloomy month of December. Wearied with her fruitless inquiries—well nigh worn out and exhausted by her travels and wanderings—Lady Saxondale resolved to return to London. The erratic life which for these three weeks she led, had only enabled her to write once to Lord Harold, and to receive one letter in reply. This letter informed her that he had not as yet found an opportunity of carrying into execution his scheme with regard to Madge Somers; for that William Deveril was almost always at the villa, and it was next to impossible to attempt anything while he was there to protect the invalid. Harold however assured Lady Saxondale that he had spies constantly watching the house—that he himself had taken a lodging in the neighbourhood, so as to be on the alert at any moment when an opportunity for action should present itself—and, that an old gardener employed on Deveril's premises, was secretly in his pay and would give whatsoever information was requisite. In respect to Madge Somers herself, Lord Harold's letter informed Lady Saxondale that the woman had experienced a relapse—that she had been again at death's door—that she was but slowly recovering—that the faculty of speech was still absent—and that she had not strength sufficient to renew her former endeavours to write anything upon a slate. Thus no positive injury had been sustained by Lady Saxondale's interests on account of this delay in getting the woman surreptitiously spirited off from Deveril's villa.

The receipt of this letter, while she was yet in Montgomeryshire, put an end to her ladyship's suspense as to what might be doing in London; and thinking it just possible that some fresh intelligence might have been received at the castle, of her son's movements with his wife and the maid, she resolved to take Lincolnshire on her way back to London.

But in the meanwhile, what had Edmund and Adelaide been really doing? The reader has seen that immediately on his arrival at Saxondale Castle after his escape from the physician's house in London, he had held a consultation with his wife; and, as Lady Saxondale had foreseen, Adelaide counselled him to go into some strict retirement until he should come of age. While the horrors of incarceration were still fresh in Edmund's mind, he needed no large amount of persuasion to induce him to adopt this course. Adelaide was not anxious to return to France: Edmund disliked travelling on the Continent; and therefore it was resolved to settle themselves in Wales. They travelled post, until they reached a certain town in Montgomeryshire, where they dismissed the chaise. At the same time they removed to another hotel in this same town—adopted another name than the fictitious one which they had borne on their arrival—and from this second hotel they proceeded by a public conveyance to another town. Thus was it that they successfully broke off the clue which, until that point, Lady Saxondale had skilfully followed up.

They settled in a small but comfortable house in the neighbourhood of that town at which they definitively halted; and for the first fortnight the change of scene, although it was the drear winter season, was sufficient to amuse Edmund's mind—especially as his wife lavished upon him all those blandishing cajoleries which she was so well enabled to exercise, and which she used for the purpose of rivetting the chains which her beauty had from the very first cast around him. But at the expiration of that fortnight Edmund was suddenly seized with a deep disgust for the monotony of the life he was leading. A capricious change of this kind was quite consistent with his shallow intellect and frivolous ideas. He could not bear living under the plain name of Mr. Jones—being no longer "my-lorded"—having no servants to wait deferentially upon him—forced by the circumstances of the place to drink wines and partake of fare which were sorry enough for one accustomed to have his appetite pampered—no carriage nor horses—and the scenery not merely wearing the aspect of sameness, but likewise a bleak wintry dreariness, around him. Even the very local circulating library itself was deficient in attractions for one of his capacity: and the only source of cheering thoughts was to be found in the blandishments of his wife. But even in respect to her, certain cold shuddering alarms

would again steal upon him—the same as those he had experienced when they were at Saxondale House; and as his mind became more and more desponding, those vague apprehensions grew more potent. Thus, by the time two short weeks had elapsed, Edmund felt that he could endure this monotony of existence no longer. It had already become insupportable.

Adelaide, who watched him constantly, failed not to comprehend what was passing within him; and she saw that it would be useless for her to endeavour to keep him in that seclusion any longer. Another consultation was accordingly held; and Edmund vowed that he would dare all dangers and go up to London. Adelaide suggested that it would perhaps be more prudent to return to the castle. There they could not possibly be taken by surprise, if a good look-out were kept: the domestics of the household were numerous—and the emissaries of a mad-doctor, instead of accomplishing their purpose, might be plunged for their pains into the Trent. Besides, Edmund might find amongst the gentry around some little society: for Adelaide thought that, in the country, persons would be less particular than in London, and that the zeal with which English people pay homage to a lord would induce them to turn a deaf ear to any flying rumours which might be in circulation with regard to the said lord's wife. Moreover, now that the first impressions of alarm in respect to the mad-house had passed away, neither Edmund nor Adelaide much fancied that Lady Saxondale would revert to the same proceeding. At all events, they could be upon their guard, as before said; and one of the first steps to be taken on their return to the castle, might be to write a letter to her ladyship, advising her for her own sake to abstain from hostilities in future, unless she wished an open warfare to arise and certain unpleasant revelations to be made in respect to herself.

Under all these circumstances therefore, the result of the consultation was a resolve to retrace their way to Saxondale Castle. They set out—they travelled by easy stages—and it was on a dark December evening that they once more crossed the threshold of the castellated mansion. When Edmund again found himself seated in the spacious, handsomely furnished, and well lighted dining-room—at a board served with a succulent repast, and the choicest wines sparkling upon the table—he felt as blithe and happy as a school-boy on his first day at home for the holidays. Nor was Adelaide herself sorry to be once more in that palatial residence—with troops of servants at her command—equipages ready at her bidding—and the treatment she experienced being that of a lady of title.

On the second day after their return—and at about eleven in the forenoon—as Edmund and Adelaide were deliberating together how they should while away the time till dinner, a post-chaise rolled up to the gate of the castle. In a few minutes one of the domestics who had received special instructions to be on the look out, hurried up to the room where Edmund and his wife were seated. The man rushed in somewhat unceremoniously, to announce that Lady Saxondale had just arrived.

"I will not see her!" exclaimed Edmund, starting to his feet from the sofa on which he was lounging by Adelaide's side.

"Is her ladyship alone?" inquired his wife: and on receiving an answer in the affirmative, she said in a hurried whisper to her husband, "Yes, let us see her. Perhaps she comes to propose some terms? At all events if she be alone, she is harmless."

"Well then, we will see her," cried Edmund aloud: and the domestic hastened away.

In a few minutes the door was thrown open; and Lady Saxondale made her appearance. She looked somewhat pale and haggard from excitement of mind and body—but yet not so much altered nor worn as most other women under such circumstances would have been: for she was of great physical capacity of endurance, as well as of being endowed with strong mental power. She entered with a composed but severe look; and Adelaide, who was deeply skilled in reading the human heart through the medium of the countenance, at once saw that she had some sternly settled purpose in view. Edmund was not enabled thus deeply to fathom the state of his mother's mind; and he surveyed her with an air of mingled mockery and supercilious contempt. Slowly and deliberately she put off her bonnet and shawl, and took a seat. More than a minute thus elapsed from the moment she entered the room—and not a word was spoken by either one of the three.

"I have been seeking you both," at length said Lady Saxondale, in a voice that was coldly calm and as severe as her looks; "and it was only at an early hour this morning I learnt that you had returned two days ago to the castle."

"Well, mother," ejaculated Edmund, with a tone and manner which under any other circumstances might be described as flippantly insolent, but which was really nothing more than what such a parent deserved, and indeed might expect on the part of such a son,—"what business is it of your's when we come or when we go? Now, I just tell you my mind. Your conduct towards me has been shameful; and if I were to lock you up for the next six months on bread and water, in one of the tapestry-chambers, or even in the chapel itself, I should be only serving you right. However, you had better take care what tricks you play me in future: for I vow and protest that I will pay you off in a coin you won't like!"

"Cease this impertinence," said Lady Saxondale, in a peremptory tone.

"But you, madam," exclaimed Adelaide, now firing up, "must fully comprehend that you are not permitted to give yourself these airs in our presence."

"And you, madam, understand," returned Lady Saxondale, drawing herself up with the haughtiest dignity, "that you are both of you only in this castle by sufferance—that for the present it is mine, or at least under my control—and that the domestics will obey whatsoever order I choose to give them."

"There may be two words to that!" exclaimed Edmund. "If you like to try it on, mother, we will just ring the bell; and when I order the first footman who comes, to turn you out, we will see whether I am obeyed or not."

"I was fully prepared for some such insolence as

this from you, young viper that you are!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, for an instant losing the command of her temper.

"Viper—eh?" echoed Edmund. "If you want to see who can best call each other hard names, I don't mind giving you a specimen of my ability, by telling you that you are nothing better than a demirep; and you might as well take yourself off to William Deveril or Lord Harold—and perhaps a dozen others, for anything I know."

Lady Saxondale's countenance became scarlet—and her lips moved as if she were about to give vent to some strong ejaculation: but catching back, as it were, the word ere uttered—and at the same time exerting the strongest power of control over her feelings, she said, "I have but a very few words to say: you will both do well to listen; and perhaps the communication I purpose to make, will convince you that I am not to be insulted with impunity. Now let us bandy not these idle taunts. I can assure you that the syllables I am about to utter, are fraught with more importance than you may possibly imagine."

"We are all attention," said Adelaide, glancing with rapid significancy at Edmund, as much as to make him understand that it were better to allow his mother to have her say.

"Yes," continued Lady Saxondale: "matters have come to such a point that I am resolved to bring them to a settlement in one way or another, without an hour's delay. You two, no doubt, hug the belief that in a short time—in less than a year and a half from the present date—I shall suddenly become altogether powerless; that I shall sink into a mere cypher, and ye will be dominant! Now, that is a position which I am not at all prepared to accept; and sooner than look forward to such ignominy, I would bring the whole fabric of grandeur, wealth, and titles, crashing and crumbling in ruins upon the heads of us all."

Edmund gave a supercilious toss of his head: but Adelaide, laying her hand on his knee, said, "Hush!"—for she saw plainly enough that Lady Saxondale was speaking with too solemn a seriousness, and likewise with too much cold desperation in her resolve, not to have the inward consciousness of being enabled to perform that which she threatened. Lord Saxondale accordingly held his peace; and his mother went on in the following manner:—

"There is a secret which my soul has hitherto treasured up as a criminal would hold fast the tale of his guilt! It is a secret which——"

At this moment the sounds of numerous voices talking beneath the windows, reached the ears of the three persons in the apartment where this scene was taking place; and so loud—with so much apparent excitement too were those voices discoursing—that Edmund started up, exclaiming, "What is that?"

Going to the window, he looked forth—and beheld a number of the servants, male and female, gathered beneath the casement; and in the midst of them was a man in the dress of a peasant, displaying some kind of garment which he held up, so that it floated out at full length.

"What on earth can this mean?" ejaculated Edmund, who, in his silly curiosity, had for the moment lost sight of the very grave and serious manner in which his mother had just been speaking.

"Return to your seat, dear Edmund," said Adelaide: "never mind what is taking place elsewhere."

"But here is something very odd going on!" he exclaimed. "The servants all gathered together—a labouring man amongst them——What the deuce is it? He is holding up a woman's gown, I declare! Ah, what is it they say?——*'Found in the river?'*"

Lady Saxondale now hurried to the window, as if she had more curiosity than her daughter-in-law Adelaide, who only proceeded thither more leisurely—doubtless thinking that whatsoever might be going on was of very trivial importance indeed. Lady Saxondale had scarcely flung forth a glance from that casement, when she turned abruptly round, saying, "Something extraordinary has occurred: I must see what it is."

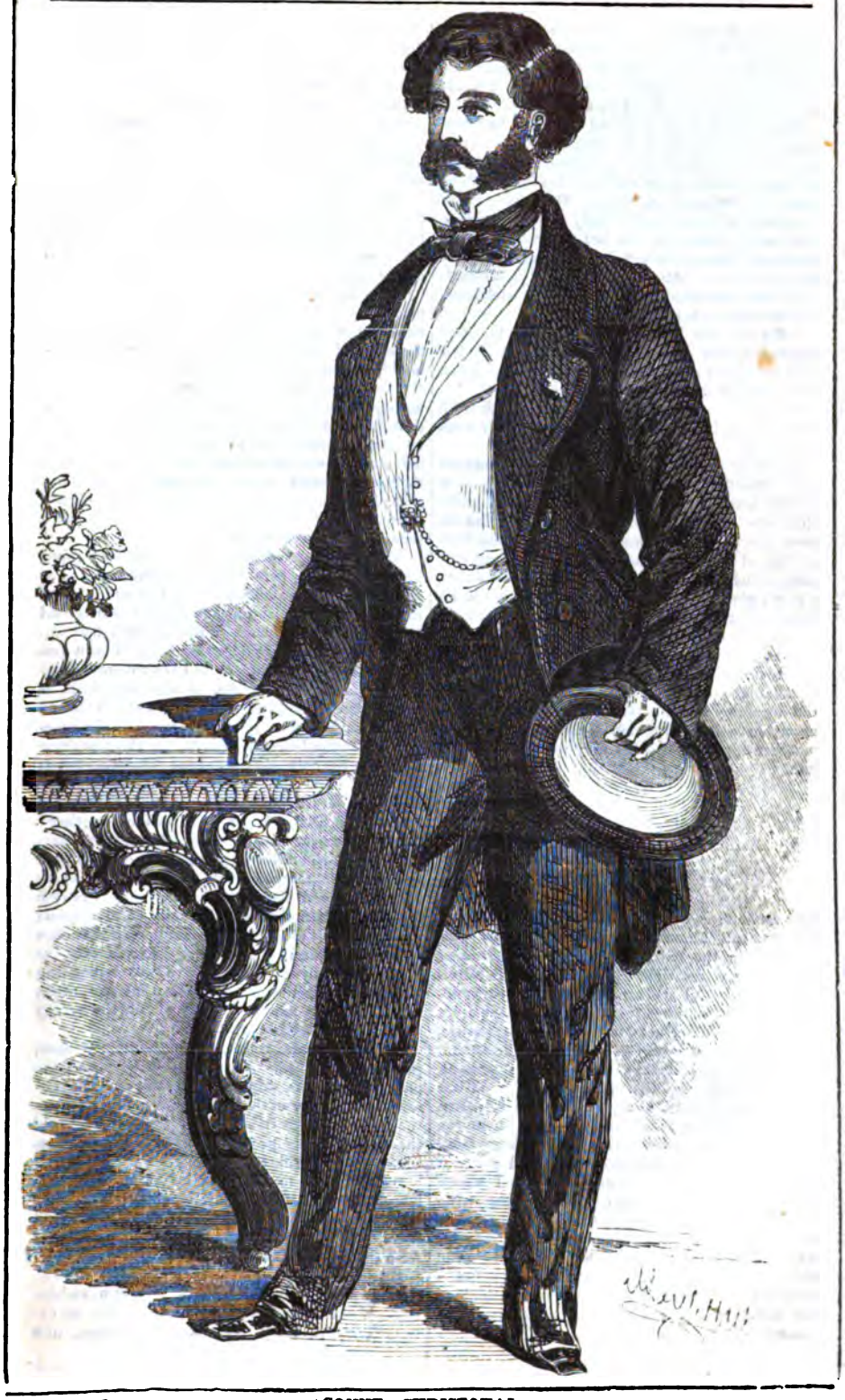
"And I will go too," cried Edmund, following close behind Lady Saxondale as she hurried forth from the room.

Adelaide remained behind, ashamed at the idea of displaying what she conceived to be a childish curiosity, and wondering that Lady Saxondale could possibly do so. Her ladyship was hurrying—indeed rushing most swiftly down the stairs,—when she caught the sounds of Edmund's footsteps behind her. All in an instant she stopped short and seizing the young nobleman by the arm with a convulsive violence of touch, she looked at him with a deadly pallor of countenance,—and said in a low hoarse whisper, "Edmund, if you recognise anything, I charge you to remain silent! Speak not a word—betray not the fact by a look—treat it with seeming indifference; and I swear to you that, as a recompense, I will do all that you wish—all that you ask! I will attempt to coerce you no more!"

Edmund gazed upon his mother with a sort of stupid astonishment: he really and truly thought for a moment she was suddenly going mad. The pallor of her countenance was absolutely ghastly: her eyes had a fixed and sinister stare: her ashy lips were quivering: she seemed as if she trembled all over with a glacial chill. In this fearful aspect which she wore, there was something too terribly real—too awfully genuine—not to smite him with the conviction that so far from being mad, she was keenly and poignantly intelligent to the imminence of some dreadful danger: and catching the infection of her own dire alarm—losing for the moment, in the bewilderment of his senses, the full meaning of the words which she had just addressed to him—he said, "Good God! mother, what is it?"

"Be calm, Edmund—be calm—be composed!" was the quick response she gave in a deep hollow voice, while her fingers closed rigidly upon his arm, as if that arm were grasped with claws of iron. "Be calm, I say! Not a word to Adelaide!—not a word, I conjure you! Listen, Edmund—dear Edmund! do me this service—and I will never molest you more. Pray, pray forgive me for the past——And now come—let us go down together. You will recognise something — for God's sake appear not to recognise it!"

Lord Saxondale could not give utterance to a syllable: he was still half bewildered and half astounded by this awful change which had suddenly come over her ladyship, and by these words to which she had given such rapid and excited



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utterance, though in so hollow and subdued a tone. He proceeded down the stairs mechanically:—at the bottom she caught him by the arm again, and said hurriedly, "Adelaide is coming! Not a word! Remember my promise! I swear to fulfil it!"

Edmund's wife, on a second thought, had conceived that there must be something more in all this than she had at first imagined; and she accordingly decided upon following her husband and mother-in-law down the stairs. The sounds of her footsteps had thus reached Lady Saxondale's ears, and made her breathe this last adjuration, full of vehement entreaty, though low in utterance, in the ear of her son. Almost immediately afterwards they were overtaken by Adelaide, who exclaimed, "Wherefore all this excitement?"

"We do not know—we are going to see," responded Lady Saxondale, without turning her head round towards Adelaide, but now speaking in her natural voice once more.

"Yes, we are going to see," added Edmund, still so much bewildered as scarcely to know what he did say.

The three traversed the great hall, and emerged forth from the front-door which was standing open. A little way on the right of the entrance-steps, stood the group of domestics, male and female, with the peasant in the midst; and this last-mentioned individual was displaying the long garment, which indeed was nothing more nor less than a lady's gown. But that dress——Ah! it was instaneously recognised by Lord Saxondale, stained, soiled, and dripping with water though it were. It was the masquerade costume which he knew that his mother had once worn!

Edmund—now all in a moment comprehending the meaning of Lady Saxondale's words—threw upon her a look of quick significancy, and thus met her appealing eyes as they were turned upon him.

CHAPTER CLIV.

THE MASQUERADE-DRESS.

The servants and the peasant were all talking at the moment Edmund, his mother, and his wife, issued from the entrance-hall: but on beholding them, their voices suddenly ceased through a feeling of respectful deference. Edmund said nothing: Adelaide gazed with curiosity: and Lady Saxondale, with her usual air of perfect composure, inquired, "What is all this excitement about?"

"Please your ladyship," answered the peasant, "I just now dragged this out of the river. I was going along the bank at a very little distance from the castle t'other side"—and he pointed in the Gainsborough direction—"when I saw something that looked like a woman's dress; and I was at first afraid it was a female drowned. So I waded in, and drew out this gown. It had some string round it; and what seemed to be some little bits of thick paper just sticking to the string. Leastways I took it to be paper: but it all came off in my hand——However, here's the dress; and a very fine one it must have been, though the mud has soiled it and the water has taken out the colour."

"One would think it had been a masquerading dress," observed Lucilla the lady's-maid: but the remark was thrown forth without any sinister intent, as she was perfectly ignorant that her mistress had ever worn such a costume.

"But I tell your ladyship what," continued the peasant, "as I have been already telling your ladyship's servants. I recollect perfectly well that one of those poor young women——"

"Edmund, it is very cold out here," said Lady Saxondale, turning quickly to her son, but darting upon him a significant look at the same time. "Let us go into the hall, and hear what the man has to say."

With these words she took the young nobleman's arm; and as they ascended the entrance-steps together, she breathed in a hurried and scarcely audible whisper, "For heaven's sake, Edmund, as little emotion as possible!"

"Don't be afraid," was Lord Saxondale's immediate response, also quickly whispered: for now that the first access of excitement had gone by, he comprehended that by some means or another his mother was completely in his power; and though he could not at the moment precisely settle his thoughts as to the full meaning of her alarm, he was nevertheless already smitten with some dark and dreadful suspicion.

Adelaide was too keen not to observe something peculiar on the part of her husband and her mother-in-law,—especially as she had noticed that rapid exchange of significant glances which had taken place the instant Edmund's eyes had encountered the saturated garment. And then Lucilla's observation, that it looked like a masquerade-costume, had brought, like a lightning-flash, a recollection to Adelaide's mind. For she had heard from Edmund's lips the whole story of the masquerade at the Duke and Duchess of Harcourt's,—how Lady Saxondale had met Lord Harold Staunton there—and how she had incited him to provoke William Deveril to a duel. She had likewise learnt how Edmund had ransacked his mother's boxes to discover that dress—and how he had succeeded: but she never knew that it had fallen into the hands of the unfortunate Emily Archer, *alias* Mademoiselle d'Alembert—for the simple reason that Lord Saxondale had thought fit to conceal from his wife the fact that he had possessed such a charming mistress. However, Adelaide saw, as we have already said, that there was something very peculiar in the present affair: but she made no observation—neither by her looks did she betray what was passing in her mind.

Lady Saxondale, leaning upon Edmund's arm, passed into the hall,—Adelaide following close—the peasant, with the dripping garment, and the domestics crowding in the rear.

"Yes, assuredly it is a masquerade-dress," said the butler, as the peasant now stretched the costume on the marble pavement.

"I was about to tell your ladyship," said this labouring man, "what my opinion is. It was at the cottage where I live with my mother and sister, that those two unfortunate women stopped for a little while that night when they were murdered——"

Here Adelaide could scarcely repress a sudden start: for all that had hitherto struck her as extraordinary in Lady Saxondale's behaviour, in a

ment associated itself with the tragedy thus revealed by the last few words the labouring man had spoken. From beneath her long lashes she darted a quick glance at her mother-in-law; and her power of penetration showed her at once that the cold outward composure which her ladyship wore, was merely a mask concealing poignant feelings of trouble and agitation that were working within. But Adelaide still remained silent; and instantaneously regaining complete command over herself, she continued to listen with merely an appearance of such curiosity as one might naturally feel under such circumstances.

"And I noticed," continued the peasant, "that the one who seemed the servant girl, carried a large parcel done up in brown paper, and tied round with string. Now, when the bodies were discovered murdered on the bank of the river, the parcel had disappeared; and this was proved on the inquest. I really do believe the dress that lies there was what the parcel contained. It seems that the servant's mistress was a theatre-dancer, or something of that sort; and so perhaps she was accustomed to wear this very identical dress. Depend upon it, my lady, that my opinion isn't far wrong."

"Perhaps not," said Lady Saxondale, with the appearance of her wonted calmness. "But the incident is of no consequence now: it cannot assist in the discovery——"

But here she stopped short; and stooping down, affected to examine the texture of the wet garment.

"Please your ladyship, with due deference," suggested the butler, "I think this incident ought to be made known to a magistrate."

"And please your ladyship," added the steward, "such is my idea. The murder was as mysterious as it was horrible; and everything at all connected with it, must of necessity be made public."

"Besides," continued the butler, "there are instances where police-officers are so uncommon sharp, that the slightest clue puts them on the right scent—and a new link in a chain serves as a guide to the detection of the guilty ones."

"Yes," said the peasant: "I am determined to go to some justice-of-the-peace, and tell him what I have found. It can do no harm if it does no good. Besides, it would seem as if the thing sat heavy on my conscience, if I didn't do so. Let me see—who's the nearest justice—Mr. Denison or Mr. Hawkshaw? By the bye, I have got a call to make in the direction of Hawkshaw Hall; and so I'll go straight off there at once."

An expression of trouble, which she could not possibly subdue, passed over the features of Lady Saxondale, as the labouring man thus spoke. The servants all beheld that look on the part of their mistress: but they every one attributed it to a feeling of mingled annoyance and shame at the mention of the name of Hawkshaw, which they naturally supposed must vividly bring back to her mind the dread exposure of that day when the intended twofold wedding was interrupted and cut short. Edmund likewise observed that look, and it strengthened the dark suspicion which had already arisen in his mind; while Adelaide, more prompt to jump at an extreme conclusion, felt her own suspicion fully confirmed.

"Well, my good fellow," said Lord Saxondale, thinking it better to put a stop to this matter, if possible, "I don't know that you need trouble Squire Hawkshaw——Just leave the dress here, and I'll deliberate what is to be done with it."

"Beg your lordship's pardon," replied the peasant; "but this is a matter for a justice to sift. I should have gone straight off with it at once: only just as I dragged it out of the river, the steward was passing along—and as we got talking on the subject, I came as far as the castle. No offence, my lord, for not taking your lordship's advice: but where murder has been done, no good ever comes of keeping a thing in one's own hands—and I sha'n't feel easy in my mind till I have delivered this dress up to a justice."

"Well, my good man, have your own way," interrupted Lady Saxondale. "I see that you are very wet—you have been in the water. Go to the servants' hall, and get some refreshments before you set out on your walk."

Having thus spoken, Lady Saxondale turned away, beckoning Edmund and Adelaide to follow her; and she began ascending the stair-case. Her son did at once accompany her: but his wife lingered in the hall; and as the domestics were moving away in company with the peasant, who had rolled up the dress, and whom they were conducting to their own premises to give him some refreshments,—Adelaide beckoned Lucilla towards her.

"What dreadfuld murder was this, my girl," she inquired, "to which allusion has been made? I never heard of it before; and I know that my lord and her ladyship will give me no particulars, for fear of frightening me."

"Ah, my lady," responded Lucilla, naturally supposing that she was thus questioned through mere ordinary curiosity on the part of Adelaide; "it was indeed a shocking thing. Let me see? It happened four or five months back——To be sure! Lady Macdonald and Lady Florina Staunton were staying at the castle——Yes, and Lord Harold too——"

"Ah! Lord Harold Staunton was staying here at the time—was he?"

"Yes, my lady. I recollect he was ill in bed: he had been thrown from one of Mr. Hawkshaw's horses, which he would persist in riding. It was very mad of his lordship, you know, when he was implored not to do it: for the horse was a very spirited one——"

"Well, but about this dreadful tragedy," said Adelaide.

"Dreadful indeed, my lady! The victims were an opera-dancer and her servant——the dancer's name was Mademoiselle d'Alembert: but if I recollect right, her real one was Emily Archer; and she was a splendid creature, as I have heard say. Well, my lady, they were both found shot dead on the bank of the river—one through the brain, the other through the heart——"

"And was this in the middle of the night?" inquired Adelaide.

"Oh, no—not in the middle of the night. About ten o'clock, as near as I can recollect."

"And where were they going?"

"Ah! that nobody knows," responded Lucilla. "It was thought at the time——"

But here she stopped short, perceiving the immense error she was about to commit, and into which she had almost been inadvertently betrayed

in the somewhat excited state of her thoughts under the influence of those horrible recollections which had been so forcibly brought back to her mind.

"What were you going to say, Lucilla?" inquired Adelaide.

"Oh! nothing, my lady——"

"Nonsense! you were about to say something. Speak candidly: there is naught to which you can give utterance in respect to the present topic, that will offend me."

"I would rather not, my lady. I was foolish—very foolish," responded Lucilla, becoming every instant more and more confused.

"Now I beg that you will speak candidly," said Adelaide. "Nay, I command you. Proceed: do not be afraid of giving me offence."

"Well, my lady, since you order——but pray don't mention to his lordship——I would not for the world make mischief——indeed, I would rather not say any more——"

"Lucilla, this is foolish. Proceed."

"Well, to be sure, it was before my lord was acquainted with your ladyship; and so there's no harm done."

"What is it?" demanded Adelaide impatiently. "Do not trifle with me thus."

"I was only going to observe, my lady, that if his lordship did really know something of Emily Archer——I suppose young noblemen will be gay now and then——"

"To be sure! I comprehend you. Of course it has nothing to do with me. This unfortunate Emily Archer was intimate, you mean, with Lord Saxondale? Don't be frightened, Lucilla: you have not offended me—and I shall not mention that I have learnt anything from you. But I suppose his lordship was not here at the castle when the murder took place?"

"Oh! no, my lady: he was in London, and had not been here for some time. His lordship never liked the castle: it was too dull——"

"But where was it thought that the two women were going at the time?" inquired Adelaide.

"Well, my lady, it was whispered that Miss Emily Archer and her maid were coming to the castle for some purpose or another."

"Why was it thought so?"

"Oh, for several reasons. In the first place," continued Lucilla, "what could they have possibly been doing in the neighbourhood between nine and ten at night, unless they *were* coming to the castle? They were stopping at an hotel at Gainsborough at the time. Then again, what could they have come into Lincolnshire at all for, except to see her ladyship, or else in the hope of finding Lord Saxondale down here? Perhaps, my lady, his lordship may have turned neglectful in London——But there is yet another reason why I think they were coming to the castle."

"And that reason?" said Adelaide.

"Why, my lady, the very day before the one in the evening of which the murder took place, a post-chaise drove up to the castle—a lady got out—and her maid remained in the vehicle. The lady gave no name, and said it was useless, as she was not known to Lady Saxondale; but she had a long interview with her ladyship, and then went away. It never struck any of us at the time that this lady and her maid who were murdered, might have been the very same that came to the castle: but some days after the inquest, when we read in the county papers full particulars and descriptions, we thought they must be the same. Of course you know it was not for her ladyship to go to the inquest and say anything about the matter: because it was rather a delicate subject in respect to my lord;—and whether or not the females were the same who called at the castle, and whether or not they were again coming here in the evening when they were killed, had nothing to do with the circumstance of the murder. Poor things! they were no doubt waylaid by some ruffians."

"No doubt of it," observed Adelaide.

"I hope your ladyship will not mention that I have been talking so much on the subject," said Lucilla, who dearly loved a gossip, but who now began to reflect that she had been speaking very frankly and familiarly indeed to Lord Saxondale's wife upon a topic which was rather of a delicate nature.

"Fear not, Lucilla," responded Adelaide: "it is entirely my own fault that you have been led into these explanations."

Having thus spoken, Adelaide slowly ascended the staircase towards the apartment where she expected to find her mother-in-law and her husband.

But in the meanwhile let us see what had been taking place betwixt these two. It will be remembered that when Lady Saxondale directed the servants to take the peasant along with them and give him some refreshments, she had beckoned her son and her daughter-in-law to follow her up-stairs. Those stairs she ascended mechanically, scarcely knowing what she was doing: for, as Adelaide had but too truthfully suspected, her air of cold outward composure was only a mask which the natural strength of her mind and a sort of desperate courage enabled her to assume in order to conceal the horrible feelings and terrific apprehensions that were agitating in her soul. It was not until Lady Saxondale reached the apartment that she observed her son only was following her, and that Adelaide had remained below.

"Where is your wife?" she said, with nervous quickness, as she turned and threw a strange look upon Edmund.

"I don't know—I thought she was with us," he replied. "I scarcely know what I am thinking or doing——Upon my word, it seems as if I was in the midst of some curious dream! But now, mother, what means all this? Tell me at once——"

"Question me not, Edmund!" she interrupted him, her entire form visibly shaken with a cold tremor, which she could neither repress nor conceal. "Think what you will—but I conjure you keep a seal upon your lips: breathe not a word to a soul—answer no questions which your wife may put—and it will be all to your advantage. I cannot leave the castle immediately—it would look too strange: but in three or four days I will depart—and never more shall you be molested by me. This I solemnly swear."

"Well, at all events it is something gained," observed Edmund: and, then as he felt all his horrible suspicions in respect to his mother fully confirmed, he could not help adding, "But, my God! what made you do *that*?"

"Question me not, I say!" she responded, half in a tone of entreaty, half in one of excited impatience. "Spare me, Edmund! show yourself above wreaking upon me any anger or malice that you may feel on account of the past."

"Just now you called me a viper," said the young nobleman, unable to resist the opportunity of giving vent to that vindictive spitefulness which was natural to him, "and that is a name you have on more than one occasion flung at me. But, look you, mother! whatever I may be, I am not so bad——"

"Silence, Edmund—for heaven's sake silence!" ejaculated her ladyship, her countenance once more becoming absolutely ghastly, and an expression of indescribable horror, mingled with anguish, sweeping over her features. "I am in your power—have mercy upon me! What more can I do than fulfil the promise I have already made you?"

"Well, keep to it—and I will say no more," rejoined the young nobleman: but even as he gazed upon Lady Saxondale, he could not help feeling an ineffable aversion—a strong loathing—a deep sense of horror, at the thought of what she was; for as he himself had said, or had meant to say, he was not so bad as to be enabled to contemplate the darkest criminality unmoved or undismayed.

"Edmund," said Lady Saxondale, suddenly recollecting something, and recoiling in affright from the idea which thus struck her, "have you ever mentioned to Adelaide anything about that dress? ——But, yes! I feel convinced you have—I am sure of it! From all she said when first I met her in London, she knew everything——far, far too much!"

"Of course," responded the young nobleman, with a sort of brutal roughness: "I told Adelaide all I knew—and it was natural enough, as you have been at war with me for some time past."

"Where is Adelaide? what can she be doing? wherefore does she not rejoin us?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, sinking upon a seat, and feeling as if all the courage which had hitherto supported her, must now give way. "Go, Edmund—tell her to come hither at once——"

But at this moment the door opened, and Adelaide entered the room,—she having just come up from her conversation with Lucilla in the hall. The instant the handle of the door moved, Lady Saxondale with a mighty effort regained her outward composure: for she knew not whether it might be one of the servants who was about to enter. But when Adelaide made her appearance, her ladyship's eyes were quickly flung upon her countenance, as if to glean from thence how much her daughter-in-law knew—how much she suspected—and how she intended to bear herself in the matter. Adelaide closed the door; and advancing straight up to Lady Saxondale, said in a voice of firm severity, "Now, will you have the kindness to take up the thread of the discourse where it was just now interrupted?"

"It is unnecessary," answered Lady Saxondale.

"Unnecessary?" ejaculated Adelaide, a smile of scornful triumph for a moment appearing upon her lips: "why has it become unnecessary? On the contrary, it is more necessary than ever that you should reveal that secret to which you so solemnly and seriously alluded; inasmuch as under existing circumstances, it behoves us all to be made aware of the position in which we stand with regard to one another."

"It is needless, I repeat," rejoined Lady Saxondale. "Ask Edmund—he will tell you that he is satisfied with the arrangements entered into between us."

"Madam," resumed Adelaide, fixing a determined look upon Lady Saxondale, "your son cannot trust you—nor can I, as his wife, trust you. You spoke of a secret the revelation of which might, if you chose, in a moment bring down the whole fabric of wealth, titles, and honours crashing and tumbling about our ears——"

"It was a menace—and I recall it," said Lady Saxondale, quivering from head to foot: then in a sort of desperation, she exclaimed, "I am beaten, Adelaide—I renounce the warfare! Henceforth I leave you both unmolested—I will go hence—— What more can you demand?"

"We demand nothing more—it is precisely what we want. But," continued Adelaide, "we have no guarantee that your present demeanour is not assumed for the purpose of throwing us off our guard, the better to carry out fresh perfidies. Now, look you, Lady Saxondale! Between you and me it is diamond cut diamond: and for the interests of your son, which are identical with mine own, we must come to a thorough understanding. Have you forgotten all the revelations which Lord Harold Staunton so unconsciously made to me on that evening when in the dusk of the apartment at Saxondale House he mistook me for yourself?"

"I have forgotten nothing, Adelaide," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, again quivering all over; "and there is no need for you to refresh my memory in a single particular. Edmund, tell her that you are satisfied; and let this cease."

"Edmund will permit me," continued Adelaide, "to place matters on such a footing that henceforth he need not fear you. Listen, Lady Saxondale—do not interrupt me. On that evening to which I have alluded, when Lord Harold Staunton addressed me under the impression that he was speaking to you, he made reference to some deed which had mysteriously but terribly knitted your destinies together; and that deed which I comprehended not *then*, I understand *now*! Lord Harold Staunton was an inmate of this castle at the time when——"

"Adelaide," murmured the unhappy Lady Saxondale, the very picture of abject humiliation and despairing wretchedness,—"I have already besought Edmund to spare me: to you do I address the same prayer."

"You understand, then," said Adelaide, coldly implacable, "that you are in my power. Attempt but a renewal of hostilities against us—make but a sign which shall raise a suspicion that you are still full of perfidy—and——"

"No more!" almost shrieked forth the miserable woman, as she started from her chair. "I understand you—and I will henceforth be your slave, if you will!"

With these words she quitted the room: and repairing to the bed-chamber which she was wont to occupy when at the castle, gave way to thoughts and feelings which may perhaps be better understood than described.

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CHAPTER CLV.

THE RAMBLE.

MR. HAWKSHAW was seated with a friend at lunch, in one of the handsome apartments of his residence, and at about two o'clock on the day of which we are writing. This friend was Mr. Denison; and they were conversing together upon a variety of topics,—amongst which the presence of Edmund and his wife in Lincolnshire was included.

"I suppose you have heard," said Denison, "that Lord Saxondale and his bride came back to the castle a day or two ago?"

"Yes," answered Hawkshaw; "and by the bye, have you caught the rumour which is afloat, that Saxondale had been confined in a madhouse?"

"I know that it is true," responded Denison. "A friend of mine, writing to me from London two or three weeks back, mentioned the circumstance: but it appears that he was not many days in confinement—and how he got liberated I have not learnt."

"Ah, it is a strange family—a strange family altogether!" said Mr. Hawkshaw, shaking his head gloomily, as his thoughts at the moment specially reverted to the treacherous attempt of Juliana to inveigle him into a marriage, polluted and unchaste as she was.

"Yes—it is singular," observed Mr. Denison, "that everything unpleasant in connexion with that family, should have come out all at the same time. Here, within a few months, we have had extraordinary evidences of their profligacy or their folly. The mother exposed in respect to Mr. Deveril, and it being likewise tolerably certain that Lord Harold Staunton was her paramour—the deplorable affair in respect to Juliana, in which you, my dear friend, had so lucky an escape—Lord Harold's mysterious, and I might almost say burglarious entry, with some common ruffian, into the castle—Lord Saxondale's monstrous marriage——"

"Monstrous indeed!" ejaculated Hawkshaw: "the epithet is the very best you could have applied to it. But does his wife possibly entertain the hope that she will be received into society by the good families in Lincolnshire?"

"It is very certain," rejoined the Squire's friend, "that neither Mrs. Denison nor any other members of my family, purpose to call at the castle. It may seem hard that a woman who has been acquitted by a jury, should be thus punished by society: it may even savour of unjustifiable vindictiveness on the part of the world; but it is impossible to read the trial without coming to the conclusion that she was really guilty."

"Ah! you have read it, then?" said Hawkshaw. "So have I. It has been published in a work of celebrated criminal trials——"

"The very book in which I myself found the account," observed Denison. "But come, Squire, let us turn the conversation on a more agreeable topic. Tell me candidly," continued the old gentleman, with a smile, "have you not so far recovered your passion for Juliana as to think of committing matrimony in some other quarter?"

"Recovered?" exclaimed Hawkshaw, almost indignantly. "You ought to know, my dear friend, that I was startled up from that dream in the very hour that I obtained the conviction of her tremendous perfidy."

At this moment a footman entered to inform Mr. Hawkshaw that a peasant requested an audience of him in his capacity of a magistrate. The Squire directed that the man should be shown to the library; and luncheon being now over, he said to Mr. Denison, "You may as well come with me, and hear whatsoever the applicant may have to say."

To the library the two gentlemen accordingly repaired; and Hawkshaw immediately recognised the peasant as one of the witnesses who had given evidence at the inquest held upon the two murdered women,—at which inquest, be it remembered, he was present as a spectator. The man now carried a large parcel done up in paper: for we should observe that before quitting Saxondale Castle, he had dried the dress at the fire in the servants' hall, and had then enveloped it in the manner in which he now bore it.

"Well, my good fellow," said Squire Hawkshaw, as he and Mr. Denison took their seats at the table, "what do you want with me?"

The peasant's explanations were speedily given; and as they were the same which have been already recorded, we need not reiterate them. Suffice it to say, he concluded by observing that he did not know whether the incident would in any way assist the course of justice, or enable its officials to resume the clue of the investigations they had made at the time,—but that he considered it to be his duty to bring the case under the cognizance of a magistrate. The parcel was opened—the dress produced—and minutely inspected by Mr. Hawkshaw and Mr. Denison.

"And you say," observed the former, "that you have shown it at Saxondale Castle—and that Lady Saxondale herself is there?"

The peasant replied in the affirmative.

"Then I suppose," continued the Squire, addressing the remark to Denison, "that her ladyship is reconciled to her son and her daughter-in-law? However, in respect to the present business, I do not see that the discovery of this dress will in any way enable the constables at Gainsborough to resume their inquiry. It may, or it may not be, that the dress was contained in the parcel which was proved to have been in the hands of the maid on the fatal evening: but granting it is the same, there are two inferences to be drawn—either that it accidentally rolled into the river when the deed was committed, or that it was flung there by the murderer or murderers as something not worth carrying off."

"This latter inference, Hawkshaw, is scarcely to be deduced," observed Mr. Denison: "for why should the assassin thus seek to dispose of the dress? Would he not have merely tossed it down on the bank, if he did not choose to take it away with him?"

"But in any case I cannot see," remarked Hawkshaw, "that the discovery of this masquerading-gear—for such it evidently is—can be turned to any account in furtherance of the cause of justice."

"Do you recollect," asked Mr. Denison, who was a shrewd and thoughtful man, "whether the bed of the river itself was searched for the weapon or

weapons with which the double murder was accomplished?"

"I don't think it was," answered Hawkshaw: "and indeed I should have fancied that it would have been useless."

"Not so useless as you would imagine," said Mr. Denison. "An assassin frequently flings away the weapon with which his foul deed has been perpetrated; and your own memory must furnish you with several instances of crimes having been thus brought home to their authors."

"I have heard of knives, when stained with blood, being thrown away in the manner you describe," responded the Squire: "but pistols——"

"And why not pistols?" asked Mr. Denison. "Is not one weapon as often gifted with a tell-tale tongue as another?—I mean in respect to its identification as belonging to some particular individual. A murderer throws away his weapon under several influences:—first, in order that nothing criminatory may be found upon him, if he be stopped, suspected, and searched: secondly, in the sudden horror which supervenes after the commission of the deed: thirdly, on being alarmed by the sounds of voices or of footsteps. And now that I bethink me, in the case of which we are talking, the murderer or murderers were thus alarmed: for our friend the Marquis of Eagledean and Mr. Deveril were almost instantaneously on the spot. Assuredly it was a great fault if the river was not thoroughly searched at the time."

"Well, I am almost sure that it was not," replied Mr. Hawkshaw: "for I was present at the inquest, and I heard the head-constable of Gainsborough give his evidence, stating all the measures he had adopted to discover some clue. The rain, you recollect, fell in torrents that night; and all foot-marks were obliterated on the soft soil. He looked about for string or brown paper, to discover if possible a clue to the direction which had been taken by the author or authors of the crime after its perpetration; and he found nothing. All these details do I recollect."

"Well then, it will perhaps be useful," observed Mr. Denison, "to give the head-constable a hint; and he may yet have the bed of the river searched for the purpose I have described. You, my good man," added the old gentleman, now addressing himself to the peasant, "can tell him so from me: because the best thing you can do is to take this dress to the head-constable at once. You have acted judiciously and prudently in consulting magisterial authority; and here is a guinea for you."

Mr. Hawkshaw added another; and the peasant took his departure, infinitely delighted with the presents he had thus received. He carried the dress away with him; and returning to his own home, communicated to his mother and sister all that had taken place. Although he had walked many miles, he nevertheless set out again in the evening for Gainsborough, and repaired at once to the residence of the head-constable, to whom he gave every explanation, likewise delivering the message from Mr. Denison to the effect that it would perhaps be as well if the bed of the river were searched in the neighbourhood of the spot where the crime was committed. The constable promised compliance with this suggestion, and assured the peasant that he would consider whether the possession of the masquerade-apparel would in any way further the ends of justice.

On the following morning the constable sent for the female who had been charged at the time of the tragedy to disapparel the corpses of the murdered women; and he desired her to examine the dress minutely, and inform him, to the best of her recollection, whether it would have fitted either the dancer or her servant? In respect to the latter, the woman at once gave a negative response,—the unfortunate abigail having been too slender in figure and too short in stature for such a costume: nor indeed was it probable that she could have had such a dress for her own wearing. The woman examined it for some time; and ultimately pronounced her opinion to the following effect:—

"I perfectly well remember the form and stature of the unfortunate ballet-dancer. She was tall enough to wear this dress, but not sufficiently stout. The costume was evidently made for a woman of considerable development of contours, although the figure must have been of perfect symmetry. The wearer of such a garb would be what is termed a very fine woman."

The next step which the head-constable at Gainsborough took, was to summon to his counsels the most experienced milliner in the town; and he desired her to give her opinion in respect to the raiment,—mentioning certain details on which he sought to be enlightened. The milliner, after minutely examining the dress, and likewise consulting a book of costumes which she possessed, delivered herself in the ensuing manner:—

"This is intended to represent a Spanish costume, belonging to the Court of that country of about three hundred years ago. Soiled, faded, and ruined as it is, there is no difficulty in ascertaining that it was of the richest materials, and that its trimmings and its embellishments were of the very costliest description. I have no hesitation in pronouncing that such a dress could only have been intended for a lady of rank, or at least of great wealth; and furthermore my opinion is that it was made in London. I do not think that any provincial milliner could have turned out such an exquisite piece of workmanship as this must undoubtedly have been. The person for whom it was intended must have possessed a superb figure, of well developed proportions, but yet of a just and admirable symmetry."

Having obtained this information, the head-constable necessarily came to the conclusion that the dress belonged neither to the opera-dancer nor to her servant. It must therefore have been brought into that neighbourhood with the intention of being delivered into the hands of some lady for whom it was made. The constable remembered how it had been intimated at the inquest, that the unfortunate deceased Emily Archer had boasted at the peasant's cottage of her acquaintance with Lord Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton. He likewise reflected that the idea had all along existed that the two women were on their way to the castle when they met their untimely and dreadful fate. Thus, was it natural, that he should now ask himself the question, whether that masquerade dress had been intended for Lady Saxondale, or for any guest who might happen to be staying with her at the time? If it were so, the

fact might at the first glance appear to be of but the most trivial importance,—inasmuch as no matter whither the women were bound at the time, nor what their errand might be, the constable considered it to be perfectly clear that they had been intercepted by a miscreant or miscreants, who, for purposes of plunder, had assassinated them. But still he deemed it important to ascertain every possible particular in respect to the victims: he knew full well that the most insignificant facts, and those which at first may appear to be most irrelevant, are oftentimes found to enter as important links into a chain of evidence. Not, be it understood, that the head-constable fancied for a single moment there was any one at Saxondale Castle, either at the time of the tragedy or on the present occasion, who could throw the faintest light upon the authorship of the foul deed: he was merely now reflecting that it was important to arrive at the knowledge of any fresh particular concerning which such information could be procured.

We should add that the head-constable of Gainsborough had been much blamed at the time—as indeed is always the case with police-authorities in such cases—for not having discovered the murderers. It had been said that he was inefficient: and an attempt was even made to remove him from his situation. He had thus an important incentive to make him display fresh activity in respect to any new particulars which transpired.

The head-constable, having learnt from the peasant on the preceding evening that Lady Saxondale was at the castle, made up his mind to call upon her for the purpose of soliciting any information which she might be able to give on the two specific points—whether the murdered women were expected to call upon her on the night of the tragedy, and whether the dress was for herself or any guest staying with her at the time? But then it occurred to the official, that if the dress had really been for her ladyship, she could not have failed to recognise it as being such a one as she had ordered to be made, when the peasant took it to the castle and displayed it as already described. On the other hand, the constable argued that if her son Lord Saxondale had really been unduly intimate with Emily Archer, her ladyship would have naturally avoided any unnecessary allusion on the point, and might have chosen to keep to herself whatsoever she knew in respect to that dress. Then again he reflected how improbable it was that the son's mistress—if such she were—should have been employed as the bearer of a parcel for the mother. Thus, altogether, the constable grew more and more bewildered the longer he meditated on the matter: the day was passing away—and he could decide upon nothing. Finally, however, in the evening, he consulted a friend; and by his advice, adopted his original resolution of proceeding to the castle.

We must however go back to an earlier part of this same day, in order to describe an incident which occurred, and which must be necessarily interwoven in our narrative.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon—as the dusk at the wintry season of December was approaching—that Lady Saxondale was returning from a long and lonely walk which she had been taking. As the reader may suppose, her mind was in a wretchedly unsettled state: she could not bear to be in-doors—she could not endure the presence of her son and daughter-in-law, to whom she had completely succumbed: neither could she keep her own chamber altogether, as this would appear strange in the eyes of the domestics. She had therefore rambled abroad soon after mid-day: she had roamed about, pondering upon an infinite variety of circumstances, not one of which wore an agreeable aspect: she had likewise revolved a thousand new plots and plans, not one of which could she determine on as practicable or safe;—and she was now returning, at about three o'clock, to the castle, well nigh broken in spirit,—deeply, miserably, wretchedly desponding. Looking back through the vista of years she remembered, when, as the proud and envied bride of the old Lord of the Castle, she had first trodden with elastic step upon that soil as its mistress; and when, though her bridegroom was sufficiently aged to be her grandfather, she nevertheless gloried in the marriage as one that had raised her from the humble grade of a country clergyman's daughter to the lofty rank of a patrician of the land. Ah! at that time, little, little did she suspect what her future years were destined to evolve!—little, little did she foresee what poignant anxieties, what manifold chicaneries——aye, and what dark crimes, too, were to make up the component parts of her as yet untrodden career. But the present—the present! what was she to do now? Was she to abandon herself, without a single effort, to the loss of power, of influence, and of authority? was she to succumb without a struggle to Edmund whom she abhorred, and Adelaide whom she detested? was she to endure, unavenged, the young lord's insolent supercilliousness and his bride's triumphant arrogance? Was she likewise to fulfil her pledge, and in a day or two depart from the castle, never to return!—was she to fly to the Continent, bury herself in some seclusion, and pass the remainder of her days in a wretched obscurity? For wretched such obscurity would indeed prove to the proud, the active, and the domineering disposition of the ambitious Lady Saxondale.

Ah! but how to avoid all this?—*that* was the question. That she could still coerce Edmund if he were *alone*, she had no doubt. She would practise with him a new game: instead of tyrannizing over him, she would flatter, cajole, and coax him—she would immerse him in pleasures—she would surround him with the luxuries which he loved—she would adopt every means to enervate and emasculate him—and thus would she acquire the fullest ascendancy over his mind, so as virtually to keep him imprisoned within the scope of her influence. All this she might do if he were *alone:* but he was not! He had continually by his side a woman as astute, as artful, as designing, and as penetrating as herself—a woman who could doubtless prove equally unscrupulous—a woman who, Lady Saxondale doubted not, was but too surely guilty of the crime of husband-murder of which she had been accused! This woman, then, it was who now stood as an impassable barrier in Lady Saxondale's pathway. But could not this barrier be removed? could not that woman be stricken down in the midst of that path where her presence was so formidable? Yes, doubtless—by a crime—and only by a crime!

THE MARQUIS OF EAGLEDEAN.

Oh! but a crime——heavens! had not Lady Saxondale supped full of the horrors of crime already? Crime! crime!——was it to be ever crime? Alas, when once the road of iniquity is entered upon, crime after crime must mark the advance of those who tread it: bloodstained milestones do they become, indicating distances passed in safety, and pointing intervals of a still guiltier progress! Did her ladyship shudder, as the thought of another crime——one more crime——a crime that was to be the last and the crowning one, thus gradually arose in her imagination as she approached the castle on returning from her half-distracted ramble?—or did she begin to envisage it as the only possible alternative that was to save from utter ruin the fabric of that power which she had hitherto taken so much pains to build up? Were her warrings by day and her long agonies of toil by night—her schemings and her plottings, her manœuvres and her chicaneries, to have been passed through for naught? was all the catalogue of her crimes to become useless for the want of one more crime to crown everything with success?

It was while the thought of this new but last deed of turpitude was expanding and acquiring consistency in her mind, that Satan appeared greedily on the watch to help her onward to its consummation. There was a bridge across the river, at a spot where she halted for a few moments the better to commune with her thoughts: and as the arch had a much wider span than was requisite for the actual bed of the stream—the earth having accumulated on either bank—a portion of each of those banks was left dry beneath the bridge. We say that Lady Saxondale halted at this spot for a few moments; and while she stood there gazing upon the castle which was about a quarter of a mile distant, the countenance of a man was stealthily thrust forth from under the bridge. The eyes which thus peered out, recognised Lady Saxondale's form in a moment, though the face was unseen, her back being turned towards the individual. Then an ejaculation of satisfaction, uttered in a coarse tone, reached the ears of Lady Saxondale; and as she glanced round with a sudden start, she perceived a man emerge from the dry part of the bank beneath the bridge. She too gave vent to an ejaculation, as she at once recognised Chiffin the Cannibal.

"Well, my lady," said the fellow, "this is indeed an unexpected pleasure—though, to tell you the truth, your ladyship is just the very identical person I was wanting to see; and in a fit of desperation I meant to make my way into the castle this blessed night that is coming: for I learnt that you were staying there——"

"And what would you with me?" demanded Lady Saxondale, sweeping her rapid looks around, to assure herself that she was not observed while thus discoursing with that dreadful-looking man. "Money, doubtless? always money! For no other purpose could you seek me."

"Now pray, your ladyship," said Chiffin, with a grim smile, "don't set me down as so uncommon selfish. In the first place, it's a blessing to enjoy the acquaintance of a noble lady like you; and in the second place, how should I know but what you might have some little business in hand that I could give a help to?"

"What are your circumstances?" asked her ladyship quickly: "desperate, I presume? I thought you were going to America—that you had gone indeed——"

"Well, I told Lord Harold I should go: and I told his uncle too—that's the Marquis of Eagledean—I should go: but meaning to go and going is two very different things. Don't you see, when I make up my mind one way, Fate orders another. Lord bless you! adventures crowd upon me as thick as bees did upon the bear when he upset the hive;—and that's the long and short of it. You see, my lady, it's no easy matter for a gentleman of such a high and mighty reputation as I am, to get out of the country. The folks wont part with me: they watch the sea-ports to prevent me getting away from them."

"I suppose that you have been committing fresh deeds of horror?" said Lady Saxondale, who only thus prolonged the discourse to gain the requisite leisure for reflection upon the idea which was now uppermost in her mind.

"Well, ma'am, I have done a little more work in that way," answered Chiffin, quite coolly and unconcernedly. "There was a feller, you see, which had played me some tricks: so I took the liberty of pitching him down a well—and such a lazy vagabond he was, he wouldn't come out again. That was a matter of three or four weeks ago. The consequence was a row took place in the house; and I had to cut and run. I have been wandering and hiding, hiding and wandering, till I was nearly worn out; and then to crown it all, I fell in with a parcel of scamps at a little way-side public-house; and getting drunk, was ass enough to show what money I had about me—upon which, when I fell asleep, they robbed me of every shilling. Then thought I to myself, there is nothing left for it but to go to the castle in the hope that her ladyship may be there. I learnt from a labouring man just now that sure enough your ladyship was there; and so I came and crept under the bridge here, to lay quiet till night-time, when I meant to get to my old quarters. Now, that's the blessed truth, my lady. If you have got anything I can do for you, tell me what it is, and it shall be done: but if you have not, lend me a hundred or so—and when I am a rich man and got a large estate in North America, I will send you over a remittance."

Lady Saxondale would not have suffered the Cannibal to continue thus long in his free-and-easy, familiar discourse, were it not that she was reflecting the while in a half-abstracted manner upon that idea which, as we have already said, was acquiring a greater consistency in her mind. She looked at him: his condition fully corroborated his tale, and denoted the desperation of his circumstances. His clothes were torn in several places and soiled with mud: his hat was more than ever battered: his beard was of nearly a week's growth; and yet the fellow, though in this miserable plight, had not lost the half-dogged, half devil-me-care kind of brutal recklessness, which was wont to characterise him. His hand grasped a club:—seldom indeed was it that Chiffin the Cannibal had ever been seen without his murderous bludgeon.

As Lady Saxondale thus gazed upon the ruffian, she could not help saying to herself, "It is destined that this one last crime is to be perpetrated!

Scarcely had the idea taken birth in my mind, when Satan sent me the instrument to accomplish it. Ah! is it, then, indeed no fable that human beings may sell their souls to the Evil One? They can—they can; and the method of doing so by the formal means of a written compact, signed by one's own blood, is the only part of the proceeding which is a fiction. Ah! if I have thus sold myself to Satan, of a verity he leaves me not long in a dilemma, without sending me the means of self-extrication; and if ever he had upon earth an agent in human shape, the incarnate demon stands before me know."

Some such reflections as these swept through the mind of Lady Saxondale, as she surveyed Chiffin the Cannibal; and at length breaking silence, she said, "So your circumstances are desperate, and it would be an object to you to earn five hundred pounds?"

"Five hundred pounds!" echoed the Cannibal, whirling his bludgeon up in the air, and catching it with a full sounding grasp of his huge, muscular hand, as it fell: "five hundred pounds! Lord bless your ladyship! only a quarter of an hour back, if any body had told me there was such a sum in the world, I should really have doubted it, and fancied that I could only have dreamt of such things. But to be serious—for five hundred pounds I am the man ready to cut a dozen throats."

"Talk not thus!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, a strong shudder passing through her entire form. "Yes—there is a deed to be done, and there are five hundred pounds to be gained by the doing of it. But we must not remain here any longer now: we might be seen together—it were dangerous. Besides, after your last adventure at the castle——"

"When that gal of your's was so horribly frightened," interjected Chiffin, with a chuckling laugh. "Well, but where shall I see your ladyship again? I suppose the rooms are still shut up, as they always used to be?"

"Yes," replied Lady Saxondale; "and everything considered, it will perhaps be better for you to take up your quarters there. If seen prowling about, or observed hiding under bridges or haystacks——"

"Well, it would look rayther suspicious," observed Chiffin: "particklar as I'm not exactly in a Court-dress. Depend upon it, my lady, it's the best plan; and then perhaps you might come and hold a confab with me at the usual hour, and give me full instructions. But pray don't forget the blunt at the same time; and if your ladyship *could* manage to put a flask of brandy in your pocket—or rum, or gin—I'm not very particklar—it would be as well: for that chapel in the winter-time must be as cold as ice."

"Well then," observed Lady Saxondale, after having again reflected for a few moments, "get presently into your old quarters; and I will seek you there punctually at midnight."

Having thus spoken, she continued her way towards the castle; while Chiffin crept under the bridge again—there to rest concealed for another hour or so, until it should be sufficiently dark to enable him to effect his entry into the shut-up apartments.

"Yes—one more crime," said Lady Saxondale to herself, as she approached the gate of the castellated mansion: "one more crime—and then may I hope for security and triumph!"

CHAPTER CLVI.

THE HEAD-CONSTABLE.

It was about half-past eight o'clock in the evening, that the head-constable of Gainsborough alighted from a gig at the gate of Saxondale Castle, and proffered a request to the porter answering his summons, that he might be allowed to speak a few words with the Dowager Lady Saxondale,—adding that if it were in any way inconvenient to her ladyship, he would call again on the morrow; and that in any case he should not detain her many minutes.

Lady Saxondale had shortly after dinner retired to the library, under the pretence of writing letters—but in reality to separate herself from the company of Edmund and Adelaide: for, as the reader may suppose, they did not feel themselves very comfortable in each other's presence—while anything in the shape of pleasant and agreeable conversation, was altogether out of the question. The young lord and his wife were by no means sorry to be thus rid of the restraint and awkwardness created by her ladyship's society; and they cared but little what she did or whither she went—for they now felt assured that she was utterly disarmed and completely in their power.

Lady Saxondale, we said, was in the library, when a footman entered and delivered in precise terms the message which the head-constable of Gainsborough had sent in. At the first mention of his name, Lady Saxondale was stricken with a cold terror—a glacial chill which went quivering through her even unto her very heart's core: but nevertheless, at the distance which the footman was standing from her in the spacious library, he did not perceive that she was thus swayed by any unusual emotion. As he went on speaking, Lady Saxondale's presence of mind came back partially: for she thought to herself that the message was too civil, and that proposal of returning again on the morrow if more convenient, was too unlike a hostile proceeding, for the head-constable to have any such intention. She therefore at once bade the footman introduce the official; and during the few minutes that elapsed ere the door again opened, Lady Saxondale said to herself, "It is doubtless relative to this discovery of yesterday: but how can that dress be in any way associated with me? What clue can have been obtained. Edmund and Adelaide can have done nothing: no—I am sure not! And then too, the courtesy which marks the man's approach——No, I have nothing to fear!"

Nevertheless, as Lady Saxondale possessed a guilty conscience, she was far from being entirely free from misgivings as the constable entered the room; and her large dark eyes bent upon him the penetrating look of eagles' glances, as he bowed obsequiously in her presence. Her courage rose: for she saw that the man was himself somewhat awkward and embarrassed—and the thought flashed to her that it was probably altogether upon quite a different business he had come.

"I hope," he said, "that your ladyship will pardon this intrusion—perhaps a most unwarrantable one: but in consequence of something that has transpired, I feel it my duty to solicit a little information at your ladyship's hands."

"Upon what subject?" she inquired, with such an outward display of calmness that not for a single moment could he fancy her to be inwardly ruffled.

"It is relative to that unfortunate occurrence—that dreadful deed—which was perpetrated so mysteriously a few months back; and as there is not as yet the slightest clue——"

These last words were productive of an infinite relief to Lady Saxondale; and resuming her own seat, she motioned the constable to take a chair.

"I suppose you allude to the assassination of the two women on the bank of the river?" she observed.

"It is so, my lady. That dress which your ladyship saw yesterday, has been placed in my hands. I am afraid that the subject may be a delicate one——"

"In what respect?" asked Lady Saxondale, somewhat hastily.

"My lady, rumour did at the time whisper that Lord Saxondale was somewhat intimately acquainted with Miss Archer; and therefore it is natural to understand how your ladyship may dislike having the topic brought to your attention."

"But if it be necessary for the purposes of justice," was the response, given with a perfect maintenance of outward composure, "you must not hesitate to speak, nor I to answer. You say that no clue has been obtained to the discovery——"

"Not the slightest, my lady; and that is the reason I am anxious to glean as many particulars as I can, no matter how trivial they may be. If therefore I could learn for what purpose those unfortunate women came into Lincolnshire at all: and also——"

"I will tell you candidly," interrupted Lady Saxondale, assuming the merit of a frankness which she felt convinced she might display with all possible safety. "Yes—it is true that the unfortunate Miss Archer was my son's mistress. There was a desperate quarrel between them in London: she felt aggrieved—she considered that she had claims upon him—she addressed herself to me. Indeed, I saw her within those walls the very day before that on which she and her servant lost their lives. I could not then make up my mind what to do in the matter. I had guests staying in the castle—Lady Macdonald, Lady Florina Staunton, her brother Lord Harold—while Mr. Hawkshaw and other neighbours were constant visitors. I was fearful that a character so well known by sight as a somewhat conspicuous dancer at the Opera, might be recognised by my guests or my visitors. Moreover, my son at the time was engaged to be married to Lady Florina Staunton; and it would have been shocking for that amiable and excellent girl to discover by any means that his lordship's cast-off mistress—for this in plain terms she was—was applying to me for pecuniary redress."

"Naturally enough, my lady," observed the head-constable, gratified and proud at the mingled courtesy and frankness with which he felt himself to be treated.

"You can appreciate, therefore, my motives," continued her ladyship, "when I begged Miss Archer to give me time to think over the matter, and not to seek my presence again save and except under circumstances of the strictest secrecy. In justice to myself—though reluctant indeed to say a word against the dead—I must observe that Miss Archer was very violent. Availing herself of her knowledge of my son's engagement with Lady Florina, she threatened an exposure; and she herself, in a very peremptory manner, made an appointment to call upon me again at the castle between nine and ten o'clock in the evening of the ensuing day, to know my decision. I confess that I was angry; and I declared that if she came in a public manner—as, for instance, in any vehicle to excite attention—I would not see her. She became more humble; and of her own accord volunteered her readiness to come on foot, of course being accompanied by her maid. To this I had no objection: but little did I foresee what a terrific peril the two fated women were destined to encounter, and how dread was to be the catastrophe."

"I thank your ladyship for these explanations," said the constable, making a low bow.

"Of course," continued her ladyship, "when the inquest was held, I saw no necessity for going forward, or sending to communicate all these facts. Consider, sir, a mother's feelings——"

"I can understand them fully," exclaimed the constable; "and it was most natural that your ladyship should study to save your son from what might have been a little exposure—and at all events would have had the effect of breaking off a marriage which your ladyship at the time was anxious he should contract. And now, my lady, I have but one more word to say——"

"I can anticipate what it is," exclaimed Lady Saxondale. "You would ask me relative to the dress?—and with the same frankness I have hitherto shown, will I reply. The dress was mine; but therewith was connected a certain infamous piece of scandal regarding me. You will not ask me to repeat it: suffice it to say, it was false:—but Miss Archer had been led to believe it was true. By certain means—no matter what—she obtained possession of that dress; and she purposed to use it as a means of extortion in respect to my purse. When she called upon me, I reproached her bitterly for having adopted such vile, base means; and assured her that when she again sought my presence, if she restored me not that very costly costume which had been stolen from me——yes, *stolen* from me——I would not listen to another word she might have to say. And now, my dear sir, with your good sense, and with your delicate appreciation of circumstances, you can understand how it was that I did not choose to recognise that dress, even when inspecting it closely, on its being displayed by the labouring man yesterday."

"To be sure not!" exclaimed the constable: "your ladyship was not to place yourself in the position of giving explanations to a peasant, and before all the members of your household."

The official was indeed completely satisfied of the truth of every word which Lady Saxondale had spoken; for such was the seeming frankness of her manner and the candid openness of her

look, that it was impossible to doubt her sincerity.

"And now," she asked, "are there any other particulars which I can give you?"

"None, my lady," responded the constable, after a few moments' reflection.

"Of course," she went on to say, "you will keep to yourself all that I have been telling you: for my daughter-in-law is dotingly attached to Lord Saxondale—and I do not mind confessing to you, she is exceedingly jealous. Therefore, if she heard that my son had ever been engaged in such a *liaison* with an opera-dancer, she would be very unhappy; and inasmuch as these circumstances cannot really have the slightest connexion with any clue to the discovery of the assassins of those unfortunate women, it would be a mere wanton infliction of pain upon certain members of my family—indeed, upon us all—if the particulars were flung abroad to be caught up by the greedy tongue of scandal."

"Your ladyship may depend upon my discretion," responded the constable, as he rose to take his departure.

At this moment strange sounds reached the ears of Lady Saxondale and the constable—ejaculations loud and vehement—hurried and excited cries, as if the castle were on fire, or as if an attack were being made by banditti and the household were being summoned to resistance. Her ladyship started up with some suspicion of a new calamity: the constable listened with all his ears, as if thinking that such a disturbance must more or less regard his own official functions.

Suddenly the door of the library burst open; and Lucilla, rushing in, exclaimed, "Oh, my lady! thieves — robbers — burglars—murderers—in the tapestry-rooms!"

Lady Saxondale's vague suspicion was thus confirmed in a moment; and she grew pale as death. That she should do so, appeared by no means unnatural either to Lucilla or the constable,—considering the announcement which was thus abruptly made: but little did they comprehend the real reason which she had for being so affrighted.

"Thieves?" ejaculated the officer: and he sprang to the door.

Lady Saxondale, quickly recovering her self-possession,—or rather startled into it by the sudden consciousness of some new and frightful danger—sprang after the constable. They hurried up the staircase. On the landing and in one of the diverging corridors, some of the servants were speeding along: Edmund and Adelaide, previously alarmed by the cries, had issued forth from the drawing-room.

"What is it? what is it?" they demanded, as if speaking in one breath, and in a very excited manner: though perhaps the young nobleman was far more alarmed than his wife

"Thieves!" cried Lucilla, who had followed Lady Saxondale and the constable.

"In the tapestry-rooms, my lord!—in the tapestry-rooms, my lady!" ejaculated one of the footmen. "The steward, the butler, and several others have shouted for assistance from the passage-windows on the western side!"

Edmund rushed back into the drawing-room—snatched up a poker—and coming forth again, followed the rest towards the tapestry-rooms, taking good care however to be as much in the rear as possible: for, as the reader is already aware, he was very far from being the bravest person in existence. As for Adelaide—she, much more courageous, had fallen into the stream,—keeping pace with the constable and her mother-in-law.

From this hurried description, an idea may be formed of the confusion and excitement which prevailed; and when we add that several of the servants carried lights in their hands, which flamed and oscillated as they were borne rapidly along, it may be well conceived that the spectacle was altogether calculated to sustain that sensation of wild interest and alarm. The constable, rushing onward, soon outstripped most of the domestics: Lady Saxondale kept close behind him: and Adelaide was not far distant. In this manner the corridors and passages were soon threaded; and as they entered the western side of the castle, the sounds of loud voices, speaking in an excited manner, and emanating from the chapel, guided them all thither.

On entering that place, the spectacle which burst on the view of Lady Saxondale, was Chiffin the Cannibal struggling desperately with the steward, the butler, and two of the footmen. These four, however, had got too strong a hold upon him, and were maintaining their grasp too tenaciously, either to allow the ruffian to escape, or to do them much harm. His heavy boots certainly inflicted a few severe kicks upon their shins: but his arms were held fast—and when he endeavoured to butt at them, and even to bite, with all the ferocity of a savage beast, they were perfectly strong enough as well as sufficiently brave and resolute to retain him in their clutch. The head-constable, now darting forward, put an end to the fellow's desperate struggles, by seizing his legs and thus causing him to fall heavily on the pavement of the chapel—a proceeding which well nigh brought down with equal force those who held him.

No sooner was Chiffin the Cannibal thus prostrate, when handkerchiefs were promptly put in requisition to bind his limbs; and the ruffian was now overcome and powerless. As he lay flat on his back, he cast his grim savage looks around: his eyes encountered those of Lady Saxondale; and not quicker is the lightning-flash athwart the sky, than was the glance which she flung upon him, significantly bidding him to remain quiet and hold his peace. There was promise in that look; and the thought darted into Chiffin's mind, that it would be much better for him to keep silent, and not proclaim to those present his acquaintance with her ladyship,—as by so doing, he would only convert her into an enemy, whereas she might possibly serve him as a friend.

"Now, make the fellow sit up," exclaimed the constable, "while we determine how he is to be disposed of: for I presume he was found as an intruder here, and is but little likely to give a good account of himself."

The domestics lifted the Cannibal up, and placed him on a stone bench against one of the walls. At this instant Lord Saxondale entered the chapel; and the moment his eyes lighted upon the Cannibal, an ejaculation of astonishment escaped his lips: for he at once recognised the man who had delivered him from imprisonment at Dr. Ferney's

house. The looks of all present instantaneously settled upon the young nobleman,—his mother being as much astonished as the rest: for she knew not that Chiffin was the author of his release—neither was she aware that her son and that ruffian could have ever met before.

"Now then," growled the Cannibal, as an idea suddenly struck him, "you will perhaps let me go, when his lordship tells you that I have done him a service in my time; and it was natural enow that I should come here to ask for a recompense."

"Ah, that voice!" cried Lucilla, who at the moment entered the chapel,—she having kept completely in the rear of the living stream. "That voice! Yes—it is the same!"

The domestics at once understood what Lucilla meant; and the head-constable glanced towards her ladyship for instructions, or at least for some suggestion what course was now to be adopted, inasmuch as her son did not deny Chiffin's assertion that he lay under an obligation to him.

"You hold your tongue, young o'oman," said the Cannibal, addressing himself to Lucilla. "You never saw or heard me before, I know! And his lordship will very soon tell you all that I am a highly respectable genelman, although somewhat under a cloud at present."

"Yes—it is perfectly true," exclaimed Edmund, "that this man did me a great service:"—then, thinking that it would seem very odd if he did not specifically mention what it was, he added, "When I was shut up in a certain place the other day, he helped me out of it."

"All this appears so very extraordinary," observed the head-constable of Gainsborough, "that it must be calmly and deliberately looked into. In the first place, I should like to know under what circumstances the man was discovered within these walls?"

"I will explain," said the steward. "In consequence of something which took place a few weeks back, I have considered it to be my duty to visit the shut-up apartments on this side of the building every evening; and as there are a great many rooms to inspect—and moreover, as one does not exactly like to come here alone—I have usually been accompanied by three or four of the other domestics. Well, on coming into the chapel just now, I thought I heard the sounds of footsteps retreating into the cloister. I cried out for my comrades to hasten hither. They came: and we discovered this fellow crouching behind one of the monuments. Three of us tried to drag him out, while another hastened to the passage-window—threw it open—and shouted for assistance: for we did not know but what there might be more of them concealed in the place. The fellow struggled desperately, as you may have seen——"

"But tell me," said the constable, "to what circumstances you allude as having induced you to visit these rooms?—and what did the young woman mean by her ejaculation which seemed to imply that she recognised this individual's voice?"

"One word, sir," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, now thinking it high time to interfere. "It appears that his lordship, my son, has received a service at this person's hands; and as he himself has observed, it was natural he should come to ask for a reward. Perhaps he did not like to present himself in the usual manner at the castle-gate, and therefore obtained stealthy entrance in the hope of finding an opportunity to speak to his lordship."

"Yes—that's exactly what it is," growled Chiffin. "I was afraid that if I rang at the bell, some of these powdered flunkies would order me off, just because I don't happen to have my Sunday clothes on: and so I thought——"

"You had better hold your tongue," said the constable sternly. "I can assure you that although her ladyship, in the goodness of her heart may be inclined to put the most favourable construction on your proceeding, I am not to be equally misled. Young woman," he added, turning to Lucilla, "how is it that this man's voice was at once familiar to you?"

"Lucilla, do you hear the constable speak to you?" cried Lady Saxondale: but she only thus addressed the maid, in order to have an opportunity and an excuse for accosting her; and hastening up to the spot where she was standing, she added in a hurried whisper, "Not a word of the real truth! Say it was a mistake!"

"Now, young woman," exclaimed the constable, "don't you hear that your mistress orders you to speak out? You need not be afraid: this man can do you no harm now."

"I think I can tell the story for her," observed the steward, naturally fancying that Lucilla was cowed and over-awed by the terror of the Cannibal's presence. "The fact is, sir," he went on to say, addressing the head-constable, "there was a sort of burglarious entrance effected here a few weeks back: the maid there was alarmed by the entrance of persons into the room where she slept; and now, as you perceive, she has recognised the voice of one of them."

The steward did not at the time remember the injunction which he himself, as well as all the other servants had received, from Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw not to give publicity to the incident which he had been explaining. In the excitement of the present circumstance he utterly lost sight of that injunction.

"This grows very serious," observed the head-constable: and now he surveyed Chiffin more attentively than he had previously done. "Either I have seen you before," he went on to say, in a sort of musing tone; "or else I have read a very accurate description of you——"

"No, not of me, sir," responded the Cannibal: "it's quite a mistake. I am an honest hard-working man."

"What is your name? where do you live? and can you get anybody to speak to your character?" demanded the constable.

"My name is Brown, sir. I live in London when I'm at home —— Ask his lordship there whether I ain't a very respectable man?"

"Faith! I know nothing at all about you," ejaculated Saxondale, with a supercilious hauteur. "All I know is that you delivered me out of a certain place; and if I had met you, and you had asked for a reward, I should certainly have given it."

Meanwhile the head-constable had been scrutinising Chiffin with still more minuteness, until his original suspicion was confirmed—that in some way

or another the fellow, both by his features and his dress, was not altogether unfamiliar to him. Recollecting that he had a bundle of certain papers in his possession, he drew them forth: and stepping somewhat aside, began turning them over one after the other, by the aid of a candle which he beckoned to one of the footmen to hold close for the purpose.

"Come, my lord," said Chiffin, now getting very uneasy, "do speak a good word in my favour. Don't be ungrateful on account of what I did for your lordship."

But at this moment an ejaculation burst from the lips of the head-constable—an ejaculation of mingled horror and astonishment: and then, as suddenly resuming his wonted official composure, he said, "There is not the slightest necessity for carrying this investigation any farther. The man is my prisoner on a far more serious charge than any which might at first be brought against him. His name is Chiffin—and he is a murderer!"

Cries of horror burst from the lips of many present. The Cannibal, perceiving that he was recognised from a printed description which the head-constable had in his possession, said not another word—but reflected gloomily within himself upon the chances of Lady Saxondale endeavouring to do anything to save him.

"It now remains for consideration," the constable went on to say, "how we can best dispose of the fellow until the morning: for I should not like the risk of taking him away while it is dark—he would endeavour to escape."

"Her ladyship," observed the steward, "will permit me and some of the others to help you convey him over to Gainsborough."

"No—let the constable have his own way," Lady Saxondale hastened to observe. "He knows best; and he is responsible for the safe custody of his prisoner."

The official reflected for a few moments. He thought to himself that as Chiffin was such a desperate character, it might be perilous to venture his removal in the care of the servants of her ladyship's household; and that it would be much better to wait until daylight, and then convey him in the charge of his own police-officers before the nearest magistrate for identification, so that with proper authority he might be removed up to London. Besides, the head-constable had an eye to the reward for Chiffin's apprehension; and it would not at all answer his purpose to afford the fellow the slightest opportunity to escape under the cover of darkness. He looked around; and he thought to himself that the chapel where this scene took place, would serve as a secure prison until the morning. But in order to make sure, he took a light in his hand, and was about to investigate the chapel more narrowly,—when Lady Saxondale, as if divining his intention, said, "You are perfectly welcome to leave him here if you choose. The door has strong bolts and bars: the windows of the chapel and the cloister have iron gratings; and there is no possible means of egress."

"Besides," added the constable, "I will myself keep watch upon him throughout the night; and I shall take the liberty of asking one of your ladyship's servants to go over to Gainsborough early in the morning, and bring half-a-dozen of my men, so that we will take good care to keep him secure. I thank your ladyship for your offer, which I therefore accept."

Lady Saxondale darted, unperceived by any one else, a quick glance of intelligence upon the Cannibal, who fully comprehended that she had some friendly purpose in view in thus interfering to procure his stay there. He wore an appearance of gloomy and savage sullenness: but yet hope was in the ruffian's breast—for he knew that her ladyship was too astute and clever to be easily baffled in any project on which she had set her mind, and that she would devise some plan of outwitting the vigilance of the chief constable. This official now requested those present to withdraw,—he himself issuing forth from the chapel last of all. As her ladyship had observed, the door had massive bars and bolts; and these were all secured. There was moreover a key fastening a padlock. This key the head-constable secured about his own person. He then inquired if there were any pistols in the castle? The steward at once volunteered the loan of a pair which he had recently purchased; and these were placed in the constable's possession. A sofa was brought out into the passage from one of the tapestry-rooms, and was stationed against the chapel-door. A lamp was placed in a window-recess; and Lady Saxondale gave instructions that food and wine should be supplied for the constable's use.

These arrangements being completed, and it being now late, her ladyship directed the domestics to seek their respective chambers—at the same time observing that none of them need labour under any apprehension of being disturbed in the night, as it was evident the prisoner was too well guarded to have the slightest chance of effecting his escape. It was however some time before the servants separated,—the incidents of the evening, and the presence of a murderer beneath those walls, being sufficient to excite them, and afford ample scope for their garrulous comments. Lucilla was particularly questioned as to whether she was certain that Chiffin's voice was the same she had heard on the memorable night when her repose was intruded upon?—and as she confidently persisted in an affirmative response, the wonder of the domestics was more than ever excited at the circumstance that Lord Harold Staunton could have connected himself with such a dreadful character. But that Lady Saxondale had any previous knowledge of Chiffin, was not for a moment suspected. Throughout the scene in the chapel, she had maintained an admirable show of external composure; and the significant glances she had flung upon Chiffin, had passed entirely unperceived by all save him to whom they were directed.

On quitting the chapel, her ladyship did not join Edmund and Adelaide in the drawing-room: she did not choose to converse with them on this new incident which had occurred; but at once sought her own chamber, and having dispensed with Lucilla's attendance, sat down to reflect upon the best course which was now to be adopted.

The reader will full well understand that Lady Saxondale had purposed to employ the Cannibal as an agent for ridding her of the *one* great obstacle that was now in her pathway: namely, Adelaide. That she could still succeed in making Chiffin's services thus horribly and terribly available, she

did not imagine: but having once brought herself to look the idea of this new crime fixedly in the face, she resolved that it should be perpetrated by some means or another. Therefore she did not renounce her intention of making one more desperate effort to consolidate her own power, and pursue the career from which for a moment the incident of the masquerading-dress had threatened to divert her altogether. If she had suddenly purposed to fly from England, now that Chiffin was taken captive, she would have abandoned him to his fate, desperately reckless of whatsoever he might choose to say of her: but as she had made up her mind to remain, and prosecute her schemes to the end, it was absolutely necessary to bear a friendly part towards that man, and aid him to escape, so that he should not be led into any disagreeable revelations with regard to antecedent circumstances.

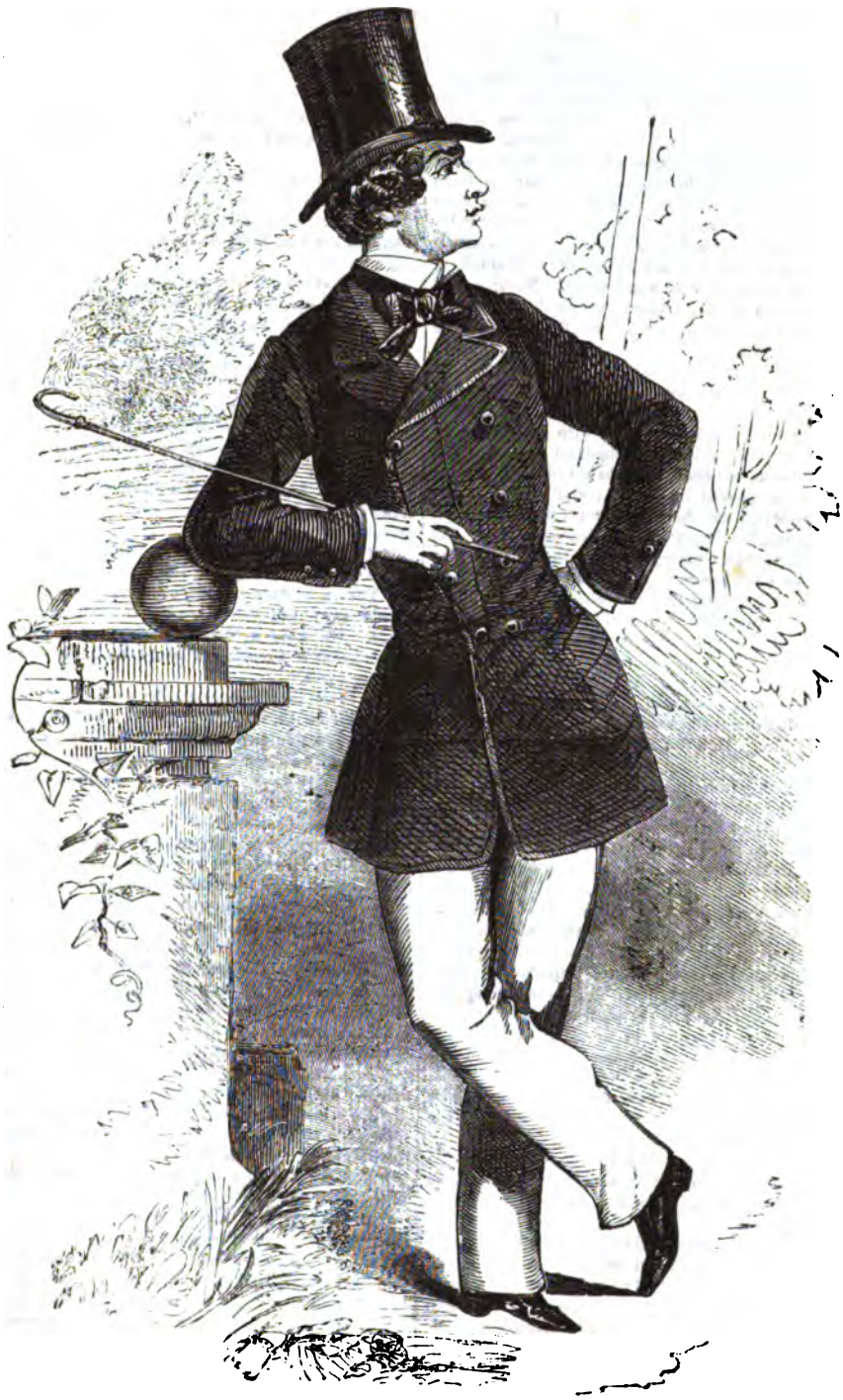
Lady Saxondale therefore decided that Chiffin the Cannibal should be enabled to effect his escape: but how was this to be done? The windows of the chapel and the cloister were all protected by massive iron bars, as her ladyship had intimated when directing the constable's attention to the fact; and the constable himself was keeping watch outside the chapel-door, which was barred, bolted, and locked. Nevertheless, Lady Saxondale could afford to smile at these circumstances,—inasmuch as there was a secret connected with the cloister known to no living soul except herself. Many long years back her husband had communicated it to her; and as it was a sort of hereditary mystery preserved in the family, she had never revealed it to other ears.

She sat in her chamber till midnight: and then, having ascertained by listening that the castle was all quiet, and that the servants had at length separated to their respective chambers, she prepared for the enterprise which she had in hand. First she took from her writing-desk a sum of money, amounting to a couple of hundred pounds in notes and gold: and this she wrapped up in a small parcel. Then, with the lamp in her hand, she descended to the library; and opening a small cupboard underneath one of the bookcases, she took from that recess a moderate-sized key. This, through long disuse, had become encrusted with rust: Lady Saxondale accordingly returned to her own chamber, and provided herself with a small bottle of hair-oil from her toilet-table. She likewise took some lucifer matches and a pen-knife; and again descended the stairs. On reaching the great entrance-hall, she extinguished the lamp; but still carrying it in her hand, passed out into the quadrangular court on which the buildings looked. The night was dark as pitch: there was consequently no danger of her being observed by any one who might not as yet have retired to rest. But as she glanced up at the windows on every side, she saw that one light was alone burning; and this was at the casement of the passage where the head-constable of Gainsborough was keeping watch.

Lady Saxondale crossed the quadrangle, and stopped at a small low door in the north-western angle. She tried the key: but, as she had anticipated, it was too rusty to turn in the lock. She oiled it; and another essay proved successful—the door opened—and she crossed the threshold. When inside, she closed the door; and then, by the aid of the lucifer-matches with which she was provided, re-lighted her lamp. She found herself at the entrance of a narrow stone passage, which led forward into utter darkness, and where the chill struck like myriads of ice-shafts penetrating through her brain and to her very heart's core. She shuddered—her teeth chattered—and she was seized with a racking pain in the head through the intensity of the cold: it seemed as if ice had been suddenly applied to her temples. But the air was pure—or at least free from mephitic vapours; and thus was it evident that the premises which she was entering, had apertures for the currents of the atmosphere to pass through.

She proceeded along the narrow stone passage,—advancing cautiously lest any of the masonry should have fallen in, and thus create a stumbling block in her way. But such was not the case: the mass of stonework forming the walls on either side, and the arching ceiling, was as solid and compact as if this corridor had been hollowed out of a granite rock itself: for the old castle appeared not to belong to time, but unto eternity. The passage was about twenty yards in length; and it terminated with a spiral ascent of steps, all of the hardest stone. Up these did Lady Saxondale mount; and in a few minutes she entered a long narrow apartment—or rather an enclosure of solid masonry—in which were the stone *mausoles* enclosing the coffins of those long-dead ancestors of the Saxondale family whose monuments were in the cloister above. For this vault—if such it could be termed, which was not underground—was precisely beneath the cloister itself, and exactly corresponding with it in dimensions. Several loop-holes on the western side—namely, the one overlooking the river—admitted the currents of fresh air. Awful was the silence and deadly the chill which prevailed in this place,—a silence fitted for the place of tombs—a chill such as that which sweeps from the sounding sea-lashed shores of Labrador. Lady Saxondale shuddered again—but it was more with the cold than with fear: for this woman of the most powerful mind, feared her crimes far more on account of what the living might do to her as the consequences thereof, than for any superstitious terrors which their memory might conjure up.

The stone *mausoles* enclosing the coffins of the long-dead ancestors of the house of Saxondale, stood in due order along the walls: and in the middle of the place was an ascent of stone steps reaching up to the ceiling—a height of about seven feet. In that stone ceiling, or roof, they appeared to terminate. Lady Saxondale ascended a few of these steps, until her head nearly touched the masonry above: and then, with the lamp, she carefully examined the stonework which was thus overhead. An iron knob set in a slight hollow of one of the stones, soon arrested her gaze: and against this knob did she press her hand firmly. It yielded somewhat to her touch: the stonework began slowly to move overhead—until at length an aperture was formed large enough for her to pass through. She ascended; and in a few moments stood in the cloister leading out of the chapel. The huge colossal figure of the armed warrior had turned almost completely round: for it moved upon a vertical pivot, and the base of its



LORD SAXONDALE.

pedestal had thus been contrived to form that secret means of communication between the cloister and the place of tombs.

Lady Saxondale passed on towards the chapel—but slowly and cautiously; for she was fearful lest the Cannibal, on perceiving a light approaching, might in an access of superstitious alarm give vent to an ejaculation that would reach the ear of the constable keeping watch on the other side of the chapel door. But the man whom she came thus to succour, was as little prone to superstitious fears as herself; and moreover, he had all along been expecting some assistance on the part of her ladyship—though he had been bewildering himself in conjectures how it could be possibly afforded, or from what quarter it would come. Nevertheless, being to a certain extent prepared, Chiffin no sooner caught a glimpse of the first glimmering rays which the lamp threw into the chapel, as Lady Saxondale approached from the cloister—than he knew full well who was nigh at hand.

We should observe that the villain had been so firmly and effectually bound with the handkerchiefs which had been fastened on his arms and legs, that all his endeavours to rid himself of those bonds had proved ineffectual; and he had therefore remained on the stone bench where the constable and the domestics had deposited him. As Lady Saxondale emerged from the cloister and came into his presence, his features expanded into a look of grim satisfaction: and really, if Chiffin were ever capable of a grateful sentiment, he experienced it now towards one who did not desert him in the hour of his most bitter need. She placed her finger upon her lips to enjoin silence; and then with the knife which she had brought, proceeded to cut the handkerchiefs which so firmly bound him. In a few moments he was thus far free.

Motioning him to gather up the severed kerchiefs and take them with him,—so that his disappearance from the chapel might in the morning seem all the more mysterious, and be all the more incomprehensible,—she led the way back towards the statue; and the Cannibal stared in astonishment on perceiving that this colossal figure had turned almost completely round, and in thus moving away from the spot it was wont to occupy, had disclosed a small square aperture. Lady Saxondale descended first: and on reaching the bottom of the steps in the place of tombs, held the lamp in such a manner as to aid the Cannibal in following her. She then ascended a few of the steps again; and by once more pressing the knob, made the image turn round into its proper place—the pedestal again hermetically sealing the secret aperture.

"Follow me," she said to the Cannibal: and these were the first words that were spoken from the instant she had appeared in his presence on this occasion.

"I am uncommon obliged to your ladyship for thus thinking of an old pal," responded Chiffin, whose heart was exultant: for he already felt as if he breathed the fresh air of freedom. "But about that there little business you was coming to speak to me of——"

"Enough! it cannot be done now," interrupted Lady Saxondale in a peremptory manner—and not without a feeling of intense disgust at the familiarity with which the coarse ruffian addressed her. "You have not a moment to lose: you must make the best of your way hence. Without halting must you speed so long as the darkness favours you: for there will be a loud hue and cry, and doubtless a fierce pursuit in the morning."

"All right, my lady," responded Chiffin: "depend upon it I will show 'em a clean pair of heels. There isn't no manner of mistake about that."

"Ah! one word, by the bye!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, as if struck by a sudden recollection. "It appears, then, that you were the person who liberated my son, Lord Saxondale, from Dr. Ferney's house?"

"Yes, ma'am—I had that honour: and uncommon neat it was done, too, I can tell you. I suppose he was locked up unbeknown to you?"

"Silence—and speak not save in answer to my questions," interrupted Lady Saxondale imperiously. "Now, tell me, by whom were you engaged to accomplish this achievement?"

"Two gentlemen, one of whom was a foreigner,—a mounseer, I should say by the cut of him."

"Ah! and his name?" cried Lady Saxondale.

"I don't know it. His friend's name was Lawson; and lives in Clifford Street, Bond Street."

"But this Frenchman—was he a young and handsome man?" inquired Lady Saxondale.

"Yes—a matter of five or six-and-twenty, I should say: tall—slender—but uncommon well made. He wore a black moustachio. I hadn't an idea that a Frenchman could be such a tidy looking feller."

"It is the same: there can be no doubt of it—the Count de St. Gerard!" thought Lady Saxondale to herself: then speaking aloud, she added, "And these two gentlemen, you say, employed you to liberate my son? Tell me the circumstances."

Chiffin accordingly explained how he encountered the two gentlemen at the *Three Cadgers*—how they engaged him to proceed to the neighbourhood of Dr. Burdett's to *reconnoitre*—how he discovered that Lord Saxondale had been removed to Dr. Ferney's—and how it was arranged that he should accomplish the young nobleman's liberation. Chiffin went on to explain by what means he had effected the purpose—how a post-chaise was in readiness in Hanover Square—how Mr. Lawson and the French gentleman, both muffled in cloaks, were on the spot—and how Lawson exchanged a few words with Lord Saxondale."

"And the Frenchman," exclaimed Lady Saxondale,—"did he speak to my son?"

"No—not a word," responded Chiffin. "I remember he kept himself altogether apart, standing on one side and merely looking on."

"Recollect, if you can, what Mr. Lawson said to my son."

"He merely told him that he didn't want no thanks; and it wasn't necessary to give any explanations. Ah! I remember—Mr. Lawson also told his lordship that he was to get off into Lincolnshire as quick as possible, to join his wife there, and she would give him all explanations. Yes—and something else too," continued the Cannibal, as the circumstances came back by degrees to his memory; "Mr. Lawson said that you was in London—that your son's wife had had a com-

versation with you—and that it was absolutely necessary for him to reach Saxondale Castle as quick as possible. And this was all that took place on the occasion."

"Enough!" muttered Lady Saxondale: and then after a few moments' reflection she added aloud, "Come—we must move onward. Follow me."

She again led the way, holding the lamp in her hand. Down the spiral staircase they went: the stone passage was threaded—and the little low door gave them egress into the quadrangle. But we should observe that ere this door was again opened, her ladyship extinguished the lamp. The threshold being crossed, she re-locked the door: and with her handkerchief carefully wiped over the spot were the key-hole was set, so that in case any of the oil should have oosed forth, the traces thereof might be effectually made to disappear.

And now she guided the Cannibal across the court-yard; and they entered the castle. Again was the lamp lighted:—for a few moments they halted in the entrance-hall; and there Lady Saxondale placed the money-parcel in the Cannibal's hand, intimating how much it contained.

"For heaven's sake," she continued, in a low whisper, "get out of the country as quick as you can. Remember, if you be recaptured, I can do nothing more for you. And should it happen that you are thus unfortunate—should you, in a word, be retaken—let me hope that whatever may ensue, you will have a sufficient sense of becoming gratitude to maintain the strictest silence as to all that has at any time passed between you and me."

"Don't be alarmed, my lady," replied Chiffin, as he eagerly clutched the money thus given to him. "If I do come to dance upon nothing at Tuck-up Fair, I will be mum as a mouse about your ladyship."

Lady Saxondale made no observation in reply to this assurance, which was given in terms so horribly ludicrous and revoltingly jocular: but she proceeded at once to afford the man egress from the castle. He disappeared from her view in the darkness of the night: and she now breathed freely as she retraced her way to her own apartment.

At an early hour in the morning—long before it was light—a groom, mounted on horseback, set off for Gainsborough; and by about nine o'clock he returned, accompanied by a post-chaise containing four constables. They came well armed and provided with hand-cuffs: for the groom had failed not to tell them what a desperate character was to be dealt with.

The head-constable had remained all night at his post in the passage where the sofa was placed against the chapel-door. He had not slept a wink; and if every now and then he felt a sensation of drowsiness coming over him, he had risen to pace to and fro and shake it off. He had scarcely touched the wine which was furnished him; and he had chiefly employed the long weary hours in thinking of the manner in which he might best lay out the reward he was to obtain for handing over the formidable and ferocious murderer to the authorities in London. He did not choose to run the slightest risk of losing him by opening the chapel-door until the arrival of his subordinates from Gainsborough. When they came, they were at once conducted to the passage where their principal awaited them; and three or four of the men-servants of the household accompanied them, not merely from motives of curiosity to have another glimpse of the terrible miscreant, but likewise as an additional guarantee against any possible demonstration of violence on his part.

The sofa was drawn away—the door was opened—the head-constable, with loaded pistols in his hands, advanced into the chapel: but Chiffin was not on the seat where he had been deposited. This circumstance excited no suspicion: bound though he were, he might have managed to drag himself away to some other spot. Into the cloister did the head-constable and his followers accordingly pass: but no Chiffin was to be seen. They looked behind the monuments: the prisoner was not there. Consternation and dismay appeared upon the countenances of the head-constable and his subordinates: but one of the footmen suggested that there could be no doubt the object of their search would be found in the vestiary. The door was thrown open: but still no Chiffin. That he could have descended into the vaults, was not possible,—inasmuch as the huge bolt of the door leading thither from the vestiary, was firm in its socket. Every nook and corner was searched: but still no Chiffin! The constables and the footmen surveyed each other in downright dismay, mingled with bewilderment. How could he have escaped? Not even the handkerchiefs with which he had been bound, were to be seen. The windows were examined: not a pane of glass was broken—not an iron bar was wrenched out.

Well indeed might those present at this fruitless search, be confounded! That a man whose limbs were so firmly fastened, should have thus disappeared without leaving behind the slightest trace of the mode and manner of his flight, seemed to be invested with a preternatural mystery. Had he evaporated into thin air? or had Satan come to claim his due, thereby anticipating the hangman's work? Not for a moment was it suspected that the head-constable had connived at his escape; for his subordinates knew him too well to entertain such an idea;—and moreover, they, as well as the footmen, at once perceived that if he had done so he would have been literally flinging away the reward offered for the fellow's apprehension; as it could not be for an instant supposed that Chiffin had, concealed about his person, a larger sum than the amount thus offered, so as to have been enabled to tempt the head-constable with such a superior bribe.

The mystery was indeed, as Lady Saxondale had foreseen, perfectly beyond the most extravagant and the wildest of conjecture. The news spread through the castle; and the utmost excitement prevailed. Her ladyship, as a matter of course, affected the supremest astonishment; and she accompanied the constables in a fresh search throughout the chapel and the cloister. But all was in vain, as she very well knew it would be; and the discomfited myrmidons of justice took their way back to Gainsborough, not without the idea that the Evil One must indeed have had a hand in so mysterious a business.

CHAPTER CLVII.

THE LAST PLOT.

Two days after the incidents which we have just related, Lady Saxondale said to Edmund and Adelaide after breakfast, "To-morrow morning I purpose to leave you. The warfare is at an end between us. That we can part with very friendly feelings, is not to be supposed: but at least let us separate in peace, and with a resolve to think on either side as little of the unpleasant past as possible."

"Well, mother," answered Edmund, "I don't want to vex or annoy you, although there are many things which might induce me to do so."

"No," observed Adelaide; "we will not have more angry words:"—but she could not repress a look of exultation at the thought that she was now completely triumphant, and that Lady Saxondale was utterly humiliated.

"Yes—to-morrow," said the latter, "immediately after breakfast, I shall leave Saxondale Castle—most likely for ever! It is my intention to repair to the Continent, and to live in tranquil seclusion for the remainder of my days. Again therefore do I beseech that the last few hours we are to spend in each other's society, may be embittered as little as possible by allusions to the past."

Her ladyship thus spoke in order to throw Edmund and Adelaide completely off their guard: and for the purpose of still more convincing them of her sincerity, she wore a desponding, a dejected, and a humiliated look, as if feeling herself completely vanquished and prostrated. But all the while she had a certain plan agitating in her thoughts,—a plan which, if successfully carried out, would not merely rid her of Adelaide, but would place Edmund completely in her power. It was a hideous and a diabolical plan—the most fiendlike which had ever yet entered the mind of this desperate and unscrupulous woman. If there be degrees in guilt—if there be shades and hues, some deeper and darker than others, in the sphere of criminality—then assuredly had Lady Saxondale prepared to stain her soul with the blackest and the deadliest of all.

After having spoken at the breakfast-table in the manner already described, she wandered about from room to room, collecting such of her trinkets as she fancied to take with her, or might seem to fancy for such a purpose: and in short, she appeared occupied with her preparations for departure. But all the while she was watching for an opportunity to speak to Edmund alone; and this opportunity was somewhat difficult to be obtained, inasmuch as Adelaide kept almost incessantly with her husband. But just before luncheon-time, Adelaide ascended to her chamber to make some little change in her toilet; and Lady Saxondale, anticipating this movement, watched her from her own room as she passed along the passage. She then glided to the apartment where she hoped to encounter Edmund: nor was she disappointed—for she found him there alone.

"Edmund—dearest Edmund," she hastily said, adopting a tone and manner of affectionate kindness,—"it is absolutely necessary I should have half-an-hour's conversation with you. You know not the importance of the matter on which I thus seek to enlighten you——Yes, terribly enlighten you! You are in danger—you stand upon a precipice—and I alone can save you!"

When Lady Saxondale first began speaking with that air of seeming kindness, Edmund gave one of his insolently supercilious smiles, and was about to tell her "not to bother him:" but the concluding words that thus met his ears, and the awfully impressive tone and look of warning which accompanied them, struck terror to his heart.

"What do you mean, mother?" he said. "Pray don't keep me in suspense."

"I cannot tell you now. Adelaide will return in a few minutes: she must not see us speaking together!"

"Then is it about her?" demanded Edmund, nervously.

"Do not question me now. I will tell you all presently: you shall *then* judge whether what I have to say is important or not. But I charge you not to breathe a syllable to your wife! Do not let her perceive there is any new secret between us! You must give me an opportunity——"

"I know how!" quickly interrupted Edmund, who was most seriously frightened. "When I go up to dress for dinner, I will steal out of my toilet-room and come to your chamber."

"I will be there," answered Lady Saxondale. "And now compose yourself!—be as usual towards Adelaide! You know not how much depends upon your behaviour in this respect!"

Having thus spoken, Lady Saxondale hurried from the room, and flitted back to her own chamber. There she remained about ten minutes until the bell rang for luncheon, when she proceeded to the apartment where it was served. Edmund and Adelaide were already there; and a glance showed her that the former was maintaining his wonted demeanour towards his wife—so that her ladyship felt assured she had succeeded in thoroughly frightening the young nobleman into silence. When the repast was over, Lady Saxondale retired altogether to her own chamber; and remained there, occupied with her thoughts, until about half-past six o'clock,—when the door opened, and Edmund made his appearance.

"Now, mother, for heaven's sake what is it?" he exclaimed, his looks showing how strong was the impression which her words had made upon him in the middle of the day.

"You must be calm, Edmund—you must summon all your courage and all your self-possession to your aid! Indeed, you never in all your life required the exercise of the strongest power of self-control so much as you do at present."

"Go on, mother! I will do as you tell me! See, I am composed. Now, what is it?"

"Did you ever hear, Edmund, of a certain Count de St. Gerard?"—and as Lady Saxondale thus spoke, she fixed her large dark eyes penetratingly upon the young man's mean and ignoble countenance, to ascertain the impression which the mention of that name would create.

"St. Gerard? Yes, to be sure!" he answered, a strong feeling of jealousy at once springing up within him.

"And you have read—or you have heard," continued her ladyship, "the full particulars of

Adelaide's trial in Paris, upwards of two years ago."

"Yes—I have read it, every syllable!"

"And the name of the Count de St. Gerard figured therein?"

"It did, mother. But what then? Was it not shown——"

"Never mind what *seemed* to be shown," interrupted Lady Saxondale impressively. "I tell you that the Count de St. Gerard was Adelaide's paramour!"

"If I thought it!" muttered Edmund, becoming pale as death.

"If you thought it?" echoed Lady Saxondale. "I tell you it is true! And what is more, that same Count de St. Gerard has followed Adelaide to England—and he has written to her."

"Mother, this is some tale of your's to answer some new purpose!"—and Edmund stopped short, for his teeth were set suddenly with a cold paroxysm of concentrated rage.

"Foolish boy! what object have I *now* to gain in deceiving you? Am I not to leave Lincolnshire to-morrow—and to quit the country in a few days? It is your very life which is at stake! I tell you the Count de St. Gerard is in England—and she who murdered one husband for the sake of her paramour, will not scruple to do the same by another! Edmund, are you aware who was the author of your release from Dr. Ferney's house?"

"I don't know," quickly responded the young nobleman. "That man Chiffin——"

"Yes—but by whom, think you, he was employed?" interrupted Lady Saxondale. "The Count de St. Gerard! He was one of the two gentlemen whom you met in Hanover Square, where the post-chaise was in readiness."

"Ah!" ejaculated Edmund, quivering from head to foot with a cold terror. "Those two gentlemen were muffled in cloaks: one was evidently an Englishman—the other, I recollect, never spoke a syllable during the few moments we were together——"

"And that other who spoke not, and who stood a little aside," added Lady Saxondale, "was the Count de St. Gerard! Was he not a tall slender young man—about six and twenty—of very genteel appearance—and wearing a black moustache?"

"True!" ejaculated Edmund, full of excitement. "But how know you all this?"

"What matter how it came to my knowledge?" demanded his mother: "you perceive that what I tell you is the truth. Nay, more,—to speak candidly, I intercepted a letter from the Count to Adelaide——"

"Show it me!" cried Edmund vehemently: and still was he quivering with the excitement of his jealous feelings.

"Nay—I have it not," responded her ladyship. "I revealed it, and suffered it to reach Adelaide's hands. It suited my purpose to do this."

"But what said the note?" inquired Edmund.

"It was such as a paramour would write to his mistress: it was couched in the most endearing terms—it left no doubt in my mind as to Adelaide's guilt in many respects,—guilt as to the murder of her first husband—guilt as to her intercourse with St. Gerard—guilt as to her utter selfishness in inveigling you into a marriage—and guilt as to her intentions towards you!"

"And those intentions?" demanded the young nobleman, trembling more than he had ever heretofore done.

Lady Saxondale bent upon him a fearfully ominous look; and in a low but impressive manner, replied, "Her intentions are to treat you as she treated her first husband——to take you off by poison!"

"My God!" muttered Edmund, staggering back with indescribable horror upon his ghastly pale countenance.

"Yes—and the vile woman," continued Lady Saxondale, inwardly chuckling as she saw how effectively her words struck the unfortunate Edmund blow upon blow,—"the vile woman has all along laughed at you!—she has ridiculed—she has mocked you—she despises and hates you. Her paramour's letter to her proved this much!"

"But wherefore did she not marry the Count de St. Gerard?" demanded Edmund quickly.

"Because he was not rich enough to support her in the extravagant style in which she is accustomed to live. She married you in order to obtain an income settled upon herself: and this she has got. Now—her purpose being fully served—she will make away with you, Edmund, that she may in due course become the wife of him whom she has all along loved!"

"But, mother, what you tell me is horrible—horrible!" and Edmund literally shivered in the excruciation of his agonised feelings. "Oh, I will fly from her!——No, I will order the lacqueys to turn her out——"

"Madman that you are!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, catching him by the arm as he was springing to the chamber-door: "do you think that a wily woman, such as she is, will not find means to accomplish her purpose even though you eject her? Yes—rest assured that sooner or later you would be taken off by some means or another!"

"My God, what am I to do?" and Edmund sank upon a chair, a prey to mingled feelings of jealous rage and horrible apprehensions. "But why," he suddenly exclaimed, "did she have me rescued from Dr. Ferney's?—would it not have suited her purpose to leave me there?"

"Must I explain everything, even to the minutest details?" demanded Lady Saxondale impatiently: "can you not fathom anything for yourself? can you not penetrate a single one of her purposes? How could she make away with you while you were at Dr. Ferney's? was it not absolutely necessary for her to have you with her? and does not the fact of St. Gerard being the real author of your liberation, prove the concert which exists between him and Adelaide? Nay, I will tell you more!—it was in consequence of reading the intercepted letter, that I discovered the plan which was contemplated for your deliverance; and therefore did I have you hastily removed from Dr. Burdett's to Dr. Ferney's."

"Oh! what am I to do? what am I to do?" ejaculated the miserable Edmund, wringing his hands: then, in the abject wretchedness of his feelings, he threw himself at Lady Saxondale's feet, saying, "Save me, mother! You told me just now that you alone can save me!—pray do it—and I will never go against your wishes any more!"

"When I said that I would save you, Edmund,"

she answered, compelling him to rise up from his suppliant posture, "I meant that I would counsel you how to save yourself."

"I will go to a magistrate—I will hurry off to Hawkshaw or to Denison—I will go to the constable at Gainsborough—anything to get rid of this dreadful woman!"—and he was fearfully excited.

"Insensate boy! will you be tranquillised?" exclaimed her ladyship sternly—though in her heart rejoicing with a fiendish satisfaction at these violent gusts of passion, which showed how effectually she had instilled the poison of jealousy and infused the influence of terror into his soul. "What would you say to a magistrate? It would be a mere vague and unsupported accusation. I could not stand forward as a witness——Alas! now you perceive the consequences of having done your best to place me in that woman's power! But is it possible, Edmund, you have been all along so infatuated as never to entertain the slightest misgiving as to her intentions towards you?"

"Misgiving?" echoed Edmund: "I have seldom been free from it! I have been haunted by vague terrors: my fears have followed me in my dreams—I have fancied that I was encircled in the coils of a monstrous serpent——"

"And as you live," cried Lady Saxondale, "it *is* a serpent in whose power you have placed yourself! Know you not that the most venomous of snakes have the fairest and loveliest of skins? Oh, my poor boy!" she added, pretending to be affected unto tears, and to be seised with a sudden revival of love towards one whom she in reality hated with the most cordial detestation,—"you must be guided by my counsel! it is for me to save you!"

"Speak, mother—speak!" exclaimed Edmund, completely beguiled by the tone, the look, and the manner she had assumed.

"You see the position in which you are placed," continued her ladyship. "Adelaide menaces your life: if she should fail, St. Gerard will take it. They have vowed between them that you shall perish by poison, or fall beneath the assassin's knife. Adelaide, who murdered one husband, is familiar with crime and all its means and resources, and will not scruple to attempt the life of a second husband. But if she fail, her paramour is ready to take up the enterprise; and he who so well knew how and where to find a ready agent to deliver you from the mad-house, will know how and where to find the same or another to have you waylaid and assassinated."

"Mother, speak!—what am I to do?" asked Edmund, in a deep hollow voice.

"What are you to do? Are you a man—and do you not in the first place pant for revenge against the woman who has beguiled you with her treachery, who has dishonoured you with her profligacy, and who now meditates your death?"

"Yes—revenge! revenge!" muttered Edmund, whose fiendish malignity of disposition was terribly excited.

"Well then, revenge!" resumed her ladyship; "and at the same instant you consummate your revenge, may you rid yourself for ever of this demoness in human shape who seeks your life!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Edmund: but again he quivered all over as he said, "You mean, mother, that I must take *her* life?"

"And wherefore not?" demanded Lady Saxondale. "Is it not in self-defence? If she attacked you with a sword, would you not snatch it from her grasp, if you could, and slay her therewith?—and is she not now meditating by insidious means to take your life? Are not all the blandishments she lavishes upon you, so many subtleties to lull you into a false security? Shall you not therefore be justified in tearing the weapons from her grasp—turning round upon her suddenly—and dealing her the death which she purposes to overtake you?"

"Would you have me poison her?" inquired Edmund, with a look of unfeigned horror.

"Aye—poison her! Why not? But no," added Lady Saxondale more slowly, as she reflected that after the tragedy of Mabel Stewart, a recurrence of a sudden death in the family might seem suspicious. "Some other plan must be adopted. But first of all, Edmund—tell me, are you resolved?"

"I am, mother!" was the response. "It is my only alternative—the only means by which I can possibly save myself."

"You never spoke anything more truly. Now look you, Edmund: the River Trent rolls deep near the bridge—and the banks are high. A female, if plunged into those waters, and encumbered by her apparel, could not scramble up the shore, if he who thrust her in was prompt and resolute in driving her back. She must drown—she must die! Nothing could save a woman in such a case! Well, even now you scarcely seem to understand me: you gaze upon me with a sort of vacancy, as if I must be explicit in every detail, even the minutest. Then be it so!"

"Proceed, mother," said the young nobleman, now quivering nervously again.

"To-morrow," resumed Lady Saxondale,—"yes, to-morrow, I say; for delay is dangerous, and you know not how soon after I am gone, the drop of poison may be poured into your coffee or your wine—or how, when you are sleeping, the phial of venom may be placed to your lips——"

"Horror!" groaned the miserable young man, whose feelings were worked up to just the very pitch which Lady Saxondale desired.

"Yes — to-morrow, I say," she continued,—"when I have taken my departure, you and Adelaide can walk out together. She will be all endearing blandishments—you must be all apparent confidence; and you will chuckle, and rejoice, and laugh together, at having got rid of me. You will lead Adelaide along the bank of the river: there is a beaten pathway—and it is pleasant walking there on these fine frosty days. When at a sufficient distance from the castle, and beyond the bridge—where the water runs so deep, the stream is so wide, and the banks are so high—you will sweep your eyes around to assure yourself that no observer is near, and you will suddenly thrust her into the river. Need I say any more? Her cries will echo around: *you* may raise shouts of seeming horror and vociferate for help. If these shouts are heard, so much the better: the more effective gloss will be thrown over the deed. In any case, when you see that she has sunk the third time——remember, Edmund, the *third* time!—you may

rush away—you may hasten back with all the appearance of frenzy and frantic grief to the castle—you may proclaim that a terrible accident has deprived you of your beloved wife. Now, have you the courage of a man——Yes, you *must* have when you think of all your wrongs! And I warn you to be deluded not by her blandishments! The more endearing they may become, rest assured the nearer is the hour when the fatal poison is to be administered. It is for you to anticipate it:—it is for you to save yourself by making away with *her*——Aye, and avenge yourself at the same time! Will you do it?"

"I will, mother!"—and Lady Saxondale saw that Edmund was resolved.

"But in the meanwhile, everything depends upon the demeanour you assume. Remember, she is keen and penetrating: a word or a look will betray you!—and if so, your life, even *before* my departure, is not worth a single hour's purchase. Now go!—return to your dressing-room—and when we meet at the dinner-table, let me see that you for once in your life can model yourself to the exigences of the occasion, and maintain the strictest control over your feelings."

Lady Saxondale and Edmund separated for the present,—he returning to his toilet-chamber, she remaining in her own apartment,—he to compose his feelings as well as he was able, she to chuckle over the detestable scheme which she had devised and which appeared to have every prospect of terminating as terribly and as tragically as she could wish. The reader cannot have failed to perceive how artfully and how skilfully this designing woman had seized upon certain incidents—had given a different complexion to them—had tortured and twisted them, so as to suit her own purpose—and had accumulated a terrific mass of evidence against Adelaide. Bad though Edmund's wife herself was, yet was Lady Saxondale's story utterly devoid of foundation: for the Count de St. Gerard was not, nor ever had been, Adelaide's paramour: he was incapable of conniving at a murderous intent, much less of entertaining one to be executed by himself;—and Adelaide harboured not the slightest idea inimical to her husband's life.

Lady Saxondale, Edmund, and Adelaide met at the dinner-table; and the first rapid searching glance which her ladyship threw upon them both, convinced her that Edmund was exercising more presence of mind than he had ever before displayed, and that his wife suspected nothing wrong. In the same manner did the evening pass away; and when they sought their chambers, Lady Saxondale said to herself, "I shall triumph yet."

But it cost Edmund a tremendous effort thus to cast a veil over his real feelings, and maintain his wonted demeanour towards his wife. He however succeeded in doing so. Firmly believing every syllable his mother had told him, because her statement appeared to be so fully borne out by a variety of facts within his own knowledge,—he regarded Adelaide as an intending murderess in respect to himself; and therefore felt that his life depended wholly and solely on his own conduct and bearing towards her. Thus did the very desperation of his position, as he believed it to be, arm him with a kind of courage which he had never experienced before. But when he went to sleep, the horrors of his waking thoughts followed him in his dreams; and once again did he fancy that he was writhing in the immense coils of a fearful serpent tightening around him. So powerful were his convulsive movements—his spasmodic throes—his heavings, and tossings, and strugglings in his sleep, that his wife was awakened by them: and when, believing him to be labouring under the influence of some terrible night-mare, she kissed him,—for it was her policy now to enchain him to her by the tenderest blandishments,—his fevered imagination made him fancy that the reptile which encircled him, was licking him with its forked tongue, to cover him with its loathsome saliva previous to the process of deglutition. He awoke with a strong start and a wild cry: but fortunately, ere his wildering senses became collected, he gave utterance to no word which betrayed what was uppermost in his mind. Adelaide therefore still retained the belief that he had been labouring under the influence of a night-mare; and when he composed himself to slumber again, it was far less disturbed.

The morning came: Lady Saxondale, Edmund, and Adelaide met at the breakfast-table; and still was the first-mentioned of the three satisfied that the other two were in the same relative position as on the previous evening—namely, that Edmund had said nothing to excite Adelaide's suspicions, and that she herself remained without the slightest misgiving. The travelling-carriage was ordered to be ready for Lady Saxondale at ten o'clock; and the moment for departure arrived.

"I am about to leave you, according to my promise," said her ladyship, addressing Edmund and Adelaide. "Farewell!"

She extended her hand to her daughter-in-law, who held it for an instant with a look of cold reserve: she then proffered it to Edmund, who pressed it far more warmly, as if in gratitude for the warning and the counsel she had given him on the preceding day, as well as a significant assurance that her advice should not be disregarded. She descended to the carriage,—Edmund and Adelaide accompanying her to the threshold of the castle, for the sake of appearances. She found an opportunity to dart one rapid look of deep meaning upon Edmund—and stepped into the vehicle.

It rolled away; and Adelaide whispered to her husband, as she accompanied him back to the drawing-room, "Your lady-mother has a fine day for her journey,"—the words being uttered with a smile of mingled irony and triumph.

"Yes, dearest Adelaide," answered Edmund,—"so fine that, if you please, you and I will enjoy it likewise for ourselves. We will ramble forth together; and while exchanging congratulations at having got rid of my mother, will discuss our plans for the future."

CHAPTER CLVIII.

THE RIVER.

LORD SAXONDALE and his wife rambled forth from the castle, the latter leaning on the arm of the former. Adelaide was now completely happy:

she was entirely without a suspicion that her mother-in-law, ere taking her departure, had instilled such venom into Edmund's veins—or that a mine had been prepared, above which she was unconsciously to tread. She considered that the desperate warfare of plots and counterplots, duplicities and machinations, which had been waged between Edmund's mother and herself, was now altogether at an end—that the former had been worsted—and that she therefore remained triumphant.

We have already said that the very desperation of Edmund's position, as he himself believed it to be, had served to endow him with a degree of fortitude which astonished even himself: that is to say, a particular kind of fortitude—the fortitude which enabled him to wear a mask upon his countenance in the presence of his wife, without betraying the secret thoughts and intents which were agitating within. Indeed, in this respect, his hypocrisy was now consummate; and as those who harbour treacherous intents, invariably assume some extreme feeling in order to veil them,—so was Edmund's manner kinder and more affectionate than ever towards Adelaide. She perceived this as they walked forth together—and naturally attributed it to satisfaction at his mother's departure.

"Now, my dear Edmund," said Adelaide, as she leant upon his arm, and gazed up with her wonted blandishment of look into his countenance,—"at length we are rid of that woman who sought to be such a terrible domestic tyrant. I hope you will not be angry that I speak thus of your mother——"

"Angry?—no!" ejaculated Edmund: "how can I be angry, when for some time past I have looked upon her as my bitterest enemy?"

"Well, she is gone at length," observed Adelaide: "in a few days she will quit England—let us hope never to return. So long as she was here, I trembled for your safety, although I did my best to conceal my fears. You know not, dearest Edmund, how much I love you; and the heart which loves as fondly as mine, is naturally full of apprehensions at the slightest chance of danger to the object of such affection."

"And you do indeed love me as much as you say, my adored Adelaide?" asked Edmund, gazing upon her countenance, which never looked more beautiful than it did at this moment: for the fresh frosty air had heightened the colour upon her cheeks—and the sunny light of satisfaction and triumph was dancing in her eyes.

"Love you, Edmund? You know that I love you!" she murmured, modulating her tones so that the music of her voice, of the melody of which she was fully conscious, might sink down with rapturous sensations into the depths of his soul. "Did I not love you from the very first moment we met?"

"Yes, yes—even as I loved you," he answered: but all the while he felt convinced in his own heart that every syllable she uttered, though glossed with honey, was nevertheless fraught with an envenomed hypocrisy.

On issuing forth from the castle, he had not immediately conducted her near the river,—but through the park, into the fields—and with an air as if it were a matter of indifference which way he went; so that in nothing should his conduct encourage the slightest suspicion in her mind. As they were proceeding along a narrow lane, they heard the sounds of a horse's feet approaching; and as a turn in the road almost immediately revealed the rider to their view, Edmund recognised Mr. Hawkshaw. It was a long time since the young nobleman had seen the Squire—never since he had last inhabited the castle some two or three years back, and when he might be described as a mere lad. He had not however sufficiently altered—and heaven knows had not so much improved in personal appearance—that Mr. Hawkshaw could fail to recognise him also. The recognition was therefore mutual: but while, on the one hand, Edmund saluted the Squire with a cordiality which might be regarded as an overture of friendship—the other returned his salutation with a frigid reserve. If Lord Saxondale had possessed the least degree of proper spirit, he would himself have demonstrated a studied coldness towards the individual who had so signally exposed his sister Juliana — notwithstanding that his sister was flagrantly and foully in the wrong. But Lord Saxondale had no such spirit: he had vanity and conceit—but no real pride, in its loftiest and noblest sense;—and thus was it that, heedless of antecedent circumstances in respect to Hawkshaw and Juliana, he was now anxious enough to avail himself of the present opportunity to renew his acquaintance with one of the leading gentlemen of Lincolnshire.

Mr. Hawkshaw instantaneously comprehended how Lord Saxondale ought to have treated him in revenge for his conduct towards Juliana; and therefore despised him for acting otherwise. He was urging his steed past,—when Saxondale, determined not to be thus almost "cut" by the Squire without an effort to amend matters, advanced a pace or two—stretched forth his hand—and exclaimed, "Well, Mr. Hawkshaw, it is some time since you and I met. I shall be very glad to see you at the Castle——But perhaps you were going there to call?"

"No, my lord—I was not," was the Squire's response, given with a marked emphasis; although at the same time he suffered Edmund to grasp the tips of two of his fingers, as he did not wish to be too pointed in his conduct.

"If you had been, we would have turned back with you," said the young nobleman. "Permit me to introduce you to Lady Saxondale——"

But at that moment the Squire gave another cold and distant bow—colder and more distant than even the first; and galloped onward.

"The unmannerly country bumpkin!" ejaculated Edmund, as Mr. Hawkshaw thus darted away upon his high-spirited steed.

"Do not vex yourself, my dearest husband," said Adelaide, again resuming all her most fascinating wiles, and putting forth the most seductive witcheries which her charms were so well calculated to display. "What care we for the society of the world, when we are all in all to each other?"

"True, dearest Adelaide!" returned Edmund, scarcely able to keep back an expression of bitterness from his countenance: for he thought that Hawkshaw's coldness was altogether on account of his wife, and not at all on account of himself, nor of the family to which he belonged.

The lane now led into a wider road; and Ed-

mund knew that a little farther on there was another diverging lane, conducting towards the river. In this direction did he resolve to proceed. But scarcely had they entered the broader road, when the sounds of an approaching equipage reached their ears; and as it came in sight, Edmund, at once recognising the servants' liveries, hastily said, "The Denisons' carriage!"

It was advancing at only a moderate pace,—as Mr. and Mrs. Denison, with their eldest son and his wife, their daughter-in-law, were taking an airing. There was consequently a sufficient opportunity for the Saxondales to observe them—and for them to observe Edmund and his wife in return. But what pen can describe the bitter mortification of the young nobleman, when he saw the occupants of that vehicle avert their heads in so marked and pointed a manner that there was no possibility of mistaking their intention to give him and Adelaide the cut direct? The equipage passed on its way; and Edmund, utterly humiliated, and quivering with rage, gave vent to some low-muttered imprecation. Again was his wife ready with cajoling blandishments; and he, fearful of exciting in her mind any suspicion of how hateful in every sense she had become to him, appeared to be soothed, and even affected to talk disdainfully and scornfully of "the wretched unmannerly beings who lived in that part of the country."

But if the terrible purpose with which Lady Saxondale had so skilfully imbued her son, had required strengthening, the malevolent intervention of Satan himself could not have conjured up incidents better calculated to achieve that end than these which had just arisen from accident. Too vain and conceited to be willing to admit that it could be in any way on his own account he was thus cut,—Edmund attributed his humiliation and discomfiture entirely to the presence of this woman to whom he had allied himself. In every way, therefore, had she become hateful to him,—hateful as one whom he regarded as being the wanton paramour of another—hateful as the murderess of her first husband—hateful as entertaining murderous intentions towards himself—hateful as the source of disgrace, opprobrium; and infamy, all of which were falling upon his own head. Nevertheless, he still maintained an outward appearance of kindness, affection, and love,—forcing himself even to chat the more gaily the nearer he drew his wife towards the river.

They entered upon the beaten pathway which ran along the bank. In their ramble they had made a partial circuit, which thus brought them back to within a mile of the castle: for it was at no great distance below the bridge that they entered upon the pathway which followed the course of the stream. Adelaide, as she leant upon his arm, was nearest to the river; and as Edmund threw his eyes forward, he perceived a point about fifty yards ahead, at which he well recollected that the bank was higher than elsewhere, and that the path skirted its very edge. He knew likewise that the water was there exceedingly deep; and not a cottage nor a hut was nigh. *That* was the spot he fixed upon to become the theatre of the terrific crime which his mother had suggested, and in the dread purpose of which so many circumstances had combined to strengthen him.

"Excellent fishing at this part of the river, in the season," he observed to Adelaide, thus suddenly breaking a brief interval of silence.

"And are you fond of angling?" she inquired. "If so, when the spring returns, we will ramble forth together—we will seek the most refreshing shades: you shall take your rod—I will bring a book; and thus will we while away the time."

"Yes—and it will be truly delightful," observed Edmund, who experienced such curious and almost horrible sensations, as he neared the particular spot, that he could not altogether conceal the excitement and agitation which possessed him.

"I am afraid, dearest Edmund," said his wife, perceiving the glitter of uneasiness in his eyes, "that you are still troubled by these incidents which have just now occurred? Pray think of them no more. You have rightly described the authors of those insults as persons of uncouth manners."

"Yes, yes—they are so," responded Edmund quickly: and he slackened the pace at which they were walking, as if to postpone as long as possible the fatal instant when the foul deed was to be done.

"Then, wherefore vex yourself on their account?" asked Adelaide, gazing up, with all the power of her assumed fondness, into his face.

"It is not so much on that account—it is not so much for them that I am annoyed——"

"On account of whom, dearest Edmund?"

"My own infernal folly!" he replied bitterly, and with startling suddenness.

"Your folly?"

"Yes—wretch!" and he hurled her into the stream.

A moment before, his looks had been swept around quick as if it were a lightning-flash that was thus circling the wintry landscape: no observer met his view—and thus at the instant the marked-out spot was reached, was his purpose executed. A wild shriek thrilled forth from Adelaide's lips, swiftly followed by a splash and heavy plunge; and for a few moments she disappeared from the view of the wretched murderer, who stood dismayed and horrified on the bank. The circling, and gurgling, and agitation of the water showed where the unfortunate woman was battling and struggling in the depths below. Suddenly she reappeared on the surface; and wild cries again rang forth.

"Edmund—murderer! Help! help! for God's sake help!"—and her countenance, distorted and absolutely hideous with the wild anguish and the dread horror depicted upon it, presented to his dismayed view a spectacle full well calculated to haunt him ever more.

Struggling and battling against the engulfing waters—carried downward by the stream—vainly did the miserable woman endeavour to reach the bank: and a second time did she disappear from the gaze of her murderer. The sudden sinking of that hideous ghastly countenance—a countenance which but a minute before was full of exquisite beauty—smote him as it were with a sense of relief: yes, *smote* him—for the revulsion of feeling was marvellously abrupt from consternation and horror, to comparative presence of mind. Then did Edmund recollect another portion of his mother's instructions: and rushing to and fro along the bank with every appearance of the most

frenzied terror, he shouted for help. All of a sudden his foot slipped—and in he fell. Fortunately for him, however, his hand instantaneously encountered the root of a tree, spreading out beneath the water, from the bank; and he was enabled to scramble safely back to a sure footing upon the land.

"Help, help! in mercy's sake, help! Edmund — villain — murderer——My God, help!" were again the wild cries which rang thrillingly forth in a voice of piercing agony, as for the second time Adelaide rose to the surface.

Edmund, full of horror at the fearful peril which he himself had but that instant escaped from, leant against the tree for support: his brain whirled—he appeared as if in the midst of an appalling dream. Again did the cries of his wife cease: again had she disappeared in the depths of the Trent. More than a minute now elapsed ere she rose again: then it was but for a moment—naught but a gurgling sound, faint, low, and dismal, came from her lips—but her limbs were convulsing and battling desperately. It was a last effort—like the last flutter of a dying bird; and she sank to rise no more alive. Ere she went down, however, this third time, the murderer caught a glimpse of her countenance,—the expression of which was far more hideous with the agonies of death upon it, than it had seemed before.

Again did he recollect his mother's words: he had seen her go down *a third time;*—and giving vent to cries and yells, which indeed seemed full of frenzied horror, he rushed in the direction of the castle. But not many yards had he thus sped, when he beheld a horseman galloping like the wind towards him; and in a few moments Squire Hawkshaw was upon the spot.

"Good heavens! what is the matter?" he exclaimed, perceiving Edmund alone, without his hat, and dripping with water.

"My wife! my wife! my beloved Adelaide! There! there!"—and with gestures apparently frantic he pointed to the river.

Then flinging himself upon the bank, he moaned and howled horribly: but it was not altogether *acting*—for his feelings were indeed worked up to a fearful pitch; and the remorse as well as the terror he experienced, were immense.

Hawkshaw sprang from his steed, and hurried rapidly to and fro on the bank, ready to plunge in at the slightest indication which the waters might afford in any particular spot, of the victim being immersed beneath. But the surface had become completely calm once more; and perceiving that all must be over, the Squire hastened to lift Saxondale up and say whatsoever he could to fortify and console him. Not for an instant did Hawkshaw suspect the terrific crime which had just been perpetrated there. How could he? Edmund's last wild cries were those which had reached his ears as he was riding at a distance; and he had only come within view of the scene in time to behold the young nobleman flying as if in frenzy along the bank, and giving vent to lamentations the genuineness of which it was impossible to doubt. Then, too, that accident which befel Lord Saxondale, and which had for a moment threatened his own life, told immensely in his favour: for was it not evident to the mind of the Squire that the distracted husband had boldly plunged in to rescue his wife?

"My lord, my lord," he said, much moved on the young nobleman's behalf, "for heaven's sake, compose yourself! I know the calamity is a dreadful one: but it must be endured with fortitude!"

"Oh! but it is shocking—it is terrible!" cried Edmund: and his accents, his looks, and his whole manner, indicated the wildness and the horror of the most genuine affliction.

"It *is* shocking!" said the Squire, who indeed felt what he thus expressed. "Come, my lord—I will see you to the castle; and we must procure assistance to recover the——"

He stopped short: he would not say "corpse," for fear of exciting fresh paroxysms of bitter woe on the part of him whom he took to be a miserably bereaved husband. And now the Squire, naturally generous-hearted, beheld not in young Saxondale a being who merited his contempt—beheld not in him a member of the family which he had so much reason to detest—beheld not in him the husband of a woman who was all but a branded murderess,—but only a fellow-creature whom a dire misfortune had suddenly overtaken. Nor in the hurry and whirl of his own feelings, had Hawkshaw leisure to reflect (believing the tragedy to be entirely the result of an accident in one sense) that it might be a providential retribution for the crime which Adelaide was but too deeply suspected of having perpetrated in respect to her first husband.

"Come, my lord—let me help you to reach the castle," he said: and sustaining the young nobleman with one arm, he held his horse's bridle in the other,—in which manner they proceeded in the direction of the castellated mansion.

"Oh, Adelaide! Adelaide!" murmured Edmund, thus forcing himself to continue his lamentations: "who could have foreseen this?"

"How did it happen?" asked the Squire, gently and hesitatingly, and displaying all that delicacy with which one fears to probe a deep wound just inflicted.

"Her foot slipped—she was walking a few paces in front of me—and in a moment the water hid her from my view. I plunged in——alas, it was vain!——I could not swim—my own life was nearly lost——Would to heaven I had died with her!"

"My lord," answered Hawkshaw gravely, "there are calamities which are sent to try us in this world, and which though deep and terrible, must nevertheless be borne."

Edmund stopped short—covered his face with his hands—and appeared to sob violently; so that the Squire had the utmost difficulty in persuading him to resume his way to the castle:—or at least it seemed as if there were all this difficulty: and so far as Hawkshaw was concerned, it was precisely the same thing. At length—after several halts, and fresh outbursts of grief, more than half simulated, but still partially arising from remorse—the castellated mansion was reached; when horror and dismay were quickly diffused throughout the household on hearing what had happened. Hawkshaw told the tale; and thus here again, as with himself in the first instance, not the slightest suspicion of foul play was enter-

tained. Edmund was hurried up to his own chamber, disapparelled by his valets, and put to bed: while Hawkshaw, accompanied by several of the servants, provided with materials for dragging the river, returned to the spot where the tragedy had taken place. A groom, mounted on a fleet horse, sped to Gainsborough to procure medical assistance for Lord Saxondale, whom Hawkshaw reported to have been himself half drowned, and whose condition seemed deplorable indeed.

In about a couple of hours, a physician was in attendance. He administered what he considered necessary; and reported to the domestics that though their master's system had sustained a terrific shock, there was no danger of fatal results. After remaining some time with Edmund, he took his leave,—intimating that it would not be necessary for him to call again until the morrow. In the course of the afternoon the corpse of the drowned lady was fished up from the depths of the Trent, and was conveyed to the castle. Hawkshaw undertook to break to Edmund the intelligence that the body had been recovered, and that it was then lying beneath that roof. As a matter of course, there was a fresh scene of apparent grief and anguish on the part of the young nobleman; and Hawkshaw again said and did all he could to strengthen and console him. When Edmund thought fit to suffer himself to be somewhat tranquillized, the Squire delicately hinted that it would be as well if his mother were communicated with by that day's post; and the steward was instructed to write at once to her ladyship at Saxondale House in London,—Edmund stating that although it was his mother's original intention to proceed to the Continent forthwith, in order to pass the remainder of the winter in Italy, he had no doubt she purposed to tarry a day in the metropolis, and would thus receive the letter. It was accordingly despatched; and Mr. Hawkshaw, after generously remaining with Edmund until a late hour in the evening, took his departure for his own abode.

Night came—the first night which this youthful murderer had to pass alone after the perpetration of his stupendous crime. It was a night which he indeed dreaded—a night which he foresaw would be fraught with ineffable horrors for himself. At first he thought of accepting the proposal which his valet made to sit up with him: but then he feared lest in his sleep—*if he could sleep*—he might give utterance to words that would betray the enormity of his guilt; and the scaffold had never ceased to loom, dark and ominous, before his eyes from the moment that the voice of conscience rang the word "*Murderer*" in his ears. So the valet's presence was dispensed with; and at eleven o'clock on this night—the first succeeding his crime—Edmund was alone. *Alone* in that chamber which he had occupied in company with his wife—the wife who was no more—the wife whom he himself had done to death! Ah, it was a loneliness in one sense—an awful loneliness: but in another it was no loneliness at all. He had the companionship of his thoughts—a horrible companionship! His mind had the companionship of the dread images which peopled it—a frightful companionship! And the room too was peopled with grisly ghastly shapes—again a dread companionship!

The wax lights burnt upon the toilet-table—— Oh, not for worlds could the wretched, guilty young man suffer himself now to be in the dark! A fire was blazing in the grate; and the play of its lurid flames on the opposite wall, seemed like spectral shapes gliding past. Edmund tried to sleep: but he dared not keep his eyes closed. Every half-minute did he open them and wildly stare around, in the dread expectation of beholding something horrible standing by his bedside. His nervous startings made the bed-curtains shake; and his blood ran cold with apprehension that a spectre was standing behind those heavy draperies. Often and often, as he thus opened his eyes, did he fancy that he caught a glimpse of some disappearing shape, in any corner of the room to which his looks were at the moment turned. No—he dared not keep his eyes closed! And yet to remain awake the whole night—to lie tossing, and heaving, and convulsing, on his pillow—at one instant with the blood stagnating and congealing into ice in his veins, at another instant tortured with a thrill of fiery agony as if those veins ran with a lightning-fluid——Oh, this was horrible, horrible! Ah, wherefore had he listened to his mother's counsel? wherefore had he done this deed? Vainly did he seek to satisfy his own conscience: vainly did he endeavour to muster, combine, and aggregate every possible argument in order to appease that conscience. He could not! Was he not a murderer? No sophistry could repel this tremendous conviction. And then, what too if Adelaide had been innocent after all? What if she had never harmed a hair of her first husband's head? What if the tale in respect to St. Gerard had been a hideous calumny? What if Edmund had really been beloved by her, and she would sooner have perished than harbour a hostile thought in respect to him? Oh, if it were all so,—then of a still deeper shade was the intensity of his guilt!—of a more hideous blackness was the enormity of his crime!

Yet no: she must have been guilty of everything imputed to her—murderous deeds as well as murderous intents!—guilty of wanton profligacy—guilty of everything that could render her character abominable, hateful, detestable! Well, but still was he justified in taking her life? No, no—ten thousand times no!

Thus was he racked by varied and conflicting thoughts,—sometimes imagining that Adelaide had been innocent—at others feeling convinced that she was really guilty; but yet with the latter hypothesis being no more able to justify his own deep criminality unto himself, than he could with the former belief. For as in the case of that former belief, such attempt at self-justification was impossible,—equally impracticable did it seem in the other. Whichever way he turned—to whatsoever point of view his mental vision was directed—there was only the one stupendous, harrowing, agonising conviction——he was a murderer!

Hours passed: the wretched young man could not get to sleep. But as the night advanced, he occasionally began to doze off—and would thus be sinking into semi-slumber for a few minutes at a time, when he would start up into complete wakefulness—wild and horrible—with the idea that the cold hand of a corpse was laid upon his cheek: or that the countenance of his murdered wife, ghastly and distorted as he had seen it on the surface of

the water, was looking in upon him through the curtains. Or else it would appear to him that those wild cries of distress which had thrilled agonisingly over the Trent, were still ringing in his ear; and as he started up, he found himself bathed in his own agony—covered with the cold perspiration that burst forth in large drops all over!

But at length he did sleep awhile without such startling interruption: yet it was to dream as horribly. Yes—it was to dream that he stood in a court of justice which was crowded from floor to roof: he beheld the jury, stern and resolute in the performance of their duty—the judge, grave and inflexible—an advocate pleading against him, telling the whole tale as the incident had really happened—and the crowd gazing on him with looks of horror and aversion. He saw the black cap produced—he heard the sentence of death pronounced. He fancied that he threw himself on his feet to implore mercy with a wild cry;—and this wild cry was real enough—for therewith he awoke.

He went to sleep again—and also to dream again. This time it was to behold a scaffold erected—a living ocean of people gathered around the dark and sinister object—the halter pendant to the cross-beam—the hangman ready to do his dreadful work. He fancied himself pinioned, walking by the side of the chaplain—ascending the steps leading to the platform of death. He mounted—he stood upon the drop—the noose was placed round his neck—the white night-cap was drawn over his countenance—the knell was tolling deep and ominous upon his ear. Then from his lips rang forth a pealing cry of agony: he started into fullest wakefulness—the cry which *again in reality* he had sent forth, was still ringing through the room; but the horrible phantasmagoria of the scaffold and the crowd had passed away. It was morning: the light was glimmering in at the casement——Thank heaven, it was morning!

Thus passed Edmund's first night after he had become a murderer——Oh, how was he to endure the approach of a second? how to look forward through the vista of coming years, and to know that they must have as many nights as days?

CHAPTER CLIX.

THE INQUEST.

The haggard ghastliness which a night full of horrors had left upon Lord Saxondale's countenance, was even more than sufficient to impress the domestics generally with the notion that he profoundly felt his bereavement; and thus was it quite unnecessary for him to simulate any show of grief. Squire Hawkshaw,—with the most generous consideration for the young nobleman whom, before his supposed calamity, he had well nigh "cut,"—called soon after the breakfast-hour at Saxondale Castle, and felt really shocked on beholding the aspect which Edmund's countenance presented. As far as ever from entertaining the slightest suspicion that there was guilt at the bottom, the kind-hearted Squire shared in the opinion of the domestics, that the young nobleman was profoundly afflicted, and that he felt his loss with a greater keenness than might have been conceived on the part of one by no means conspicuous for amiable or generous sensibilities.

This was a day of considerable bustle, even in a house of death. Tailors and milliners arrived from Gainsborough to receive orders for the mourning-apparel of the household generally: the undertaker likewise made his appearance; and in the afternoon an inquest was to be holden. The hours passed; and Mr. Hawkshaw remained with Edmund, not merely from friendly motives, but likewise because he was to be a principal witness at the inquest. During these hours Edmund paced to and fro in the drawing-room—or else threw himself for a few minutes at a time upon a sofa,—all his conduct and proceedings, however, being full well calculated to sustain the impression of his immense woe. Nor were his excitement and agitation altogether feigned: they arose from the horrors of the preceding night, as the ocean retains the trouble of its waves for some time after the storm has swept by. They arose too from remorse, as well as from apprehension of the coming night;—they arose also from a vague dread of the inquest; for though he saw not how the real truth could be suspected, yet conscience made him a coward;—and they arose likewise from the idea of having to meet his mother; because that she would very probably, for appearance' sake, hasten back into Lincolnshire on receiving the letter, he now began to surmise.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon, the coroner arrived at Saxondale Castle; and was speedily followed by the persons who had been summoned to serve as the jury, and who consisted chiefly of gentlemen or tenant-farmers dwelling in the neighbourhood. It was in the dining-room that the conclave assembled; and after the usual preliminaries, the coroner and the jury proceeded to view the body. This was merely a formal matter,—those persons contenting themselves with looking into the room where the corpse lay, and then retiring. All this while Edmund remained with Mr. Hawkshaw in the drawing-room. He had not as yet seen the body since it was taken forth from the water; and when once, for the sake of appearances, in the earlier part of the day, he had cried out, in a suddenly feigned paroxysm of despair, "that he would speed to embrace the remains of his beloved Adelaide," the well-meaning Squire had held him back.

The proceedings of the inquest occupied no great length of time. The physician who attended upon Edmund, proved that death in respect to Adelaide had arisen from drowning; and when asked, as a mere matter of form, whether there were indications of violence having been used, he emphatically, and indeed most truthfully, responded in the negative. Edmund was compelled to attend, and give an explanation of how the tragedy had occurred. The mortal terror which seised upon him when he found himself in the presence of the coroner and the jury, took the semblance of an overpowering grief; and thus was all suspicion of foul play still effectually warded off. The account that he rendered was the same as that which he had given to Mr. Hawkshaw,—though a little more detailed: but he was soon suffered to quit the room, the coroner feeling

deeply for him. Mr. Hawkshaw, when examined as a witness, gave his evidence according to his knowledge of the circumstances; and after a brief charge from the coroner, the jury delivered a verdict of "Accidental Death."

While Hawkshaw remained below, Edmund paced the drawing-room in considerable agitation. He was there alone: he could give unrestrained vent to his tortured feelings. Myriads of apprehensions crowded in upon his mind. What if, after all, there had been some witness of the deed—a witness unseen by him? What if such witness should suddenly come forward? Edmund had read of such things in books recording the annals of crime: he knew that by inscrutable means did Providence often bring home guilt to its perpetrator. Yet in spite of these terrors which were haunting him, Edmund's mind had a horrible clearness—an illimitable sense of the necessity of keeping the strictest guard over his looks, his words, and his actions. Thus, as he heard footsteps approaching the room-door, and knew them to be Hawkshaw's, he said to himself, "If I show an anxiety to learn the result of the inquest, I am lost!"

Accordingly, as the Squire entered the apartment, Edmund appeared to be again absorbed in the deepest woe, as if unmindful even that an inquest was being held at all. Yet from Hawkshaw's lips were about to come forth the words that must either confirm all his horrible terrors, or afford a sudden relief to his mind. The words were spoken: the verdict was made known—and Edmund remained with his countenance buried in his kerchief, for fear lest any change of the expression of his features should raise a suspicion where evidently none existed as yet.

The coroner and the jury, having partaken of refreshments which were served up to them, departed to their respective homes; and Mr. Hawkshaw remained with Edmund. He stayed to dinner, being unwilling to leave the unfortunate young nobleman (as he considered him to be) until the last moment: but conceiving it probable that Lady Saxondale might make her appearance that evening—and being naturally disinclined to meet her—he departed at about nine o'clock. Again was Edmund alone, but the least thing in a better frame of mind than he was a few hours back. The grand ordeal had been passed through—the inquest was over—and it had terminated in a way which had relieved his mind from torturing apprehensions. But he had yet two terrors to look in the face. His mother was coming; and the night was coming! At least, the longer he reflected upon the course which Lady Saxondale was likely to pursue, the more convinced was he that she *would* come. And why did he dread to meet her? Because he shrank from the thought of looking in the face any one who could say to him, "Thou art a murderer!"

But his mother—was not she also stained with crime? and did he not know it? Ah, yes! but the knowledge thereof mitigated little, if at all, the dread feeling which he himself must experience, of having put it in the power of any living soul to say, "Thou art a murderer!"

An hour passed: it was ten o'clock. Lady Saxondale must have received the letter at about nine in the morning: if she set off immediately, she might be at the castle now. Ah! no sooner had the young nobleman made this reflection, when the sounds of an equipage dashing up to the gateway, reached his ears. No doubt it was his mother! In a few minutes he would know; and during those few minutes he experienced the acutest suspense: for, as above stated, it was with him a horrible dread to look in the face of any one who even by a glance seemed to say, "Thou art a murderer!"

Footsteps were ascending the stairs: the door opened—and Lady Saxondale made her appearance. For the sake of show in the presence of the domestic who had attended her thither, she threw her arms about Edmund's neck, and from her lips sent forth sounds which passed well enough for sobs. The door closed—the domestic had retired—there was no longer need for hypocrisy; and therefore, abruptly withdrawing herself from Edmund, she flung her gaze upon him. Their eyes met: and the conscience-stricken young man thought that as plain as eyes could speak, those of his mother said to him, "Thou art a murderer!"

He staggered back, and sank on a chair as if annihilated. His feelings were at that moment horrible. Crime had looked crime in the face: and crime had seemed to make crime its own self-reproach. Lady Saxondale, comprehending tolerably well what was passing in Edmund's soul, smiled scornfully for an instant,—as if to be thus overcome by the sense of crime, was a weakness deserving contempt. But as that expression quickly vanished from her features, she recollected the necessity of fortifying Edmund's mind as much as possible, so that he should not be led into a betrayal of his guilt. She forced herself to speak kindly to him; and this perhaps she was the better enabled to do, inasmuch as since he had become criminal, she could hate him a trifle less than she had done before. For if virtue has its affections, so has crime: affinities of positions sometimes engender affinities of feelings. Besides, Lady Saxondale had resolved on pursuing a different course from that which she had heretofore adopted towards Edmund. Sternly resolved to wield the iron sceptre of domestic domination, she nevertheless purposed to treat him with a sufficient amount of kindness and indulgence, after a certain fashion, as would make him insensible of the tyranny of her rule. He was to be her slave without precisely knowing it. Through him would she continue the head of the house of Saxondale, even after his majority should be attained. Nominally he would be the owner of the wide domains and the lordly revenues: but she would virtually exercise supreme control over both. Such was the policy she intended to adopt: such were the prospects which were spread out before her.

Edmund was in that frame of mind when the soothing words of kindness could not be lost upon him, ill-conditioned mortal though he were. Besides, it was a relief for him to reflect that his mother, after all, did not mean to make a reproach of the black guilt which he had perpetrated, and into which she had persuaded him. He accordingly looked up; and he acquired courage from her own firm and resolute demeanour. In less than half-an-hour from the moment of her arrival, she got him to talk upon the incidents of the tragedy. He described the details—stated how generously

Hawkshaw had behaved to him—how accident had positively and literally helped him in his tale by sending the Squire at the moment to the scene of the crime—and how the inquest had passed off favourably. This intelligence, which her ladyship had not previously heard, was most welcome to her; and she was also rejoiced that circumstances should thus have partially smitten down the barriers which had lately existed between Hawkshaw and the Saxondale family. Not that it was to be supposed the Squire would repeat his visits, now that she was once more at the castle: but, at all events, in him she felt assured, from what she now heard, that they possessed a vindicator, should suspicion venture to breathe the surmise that perhaps, after all, Edmund's wife had not come fairly by her death.

The hour for retiring arrived; and Lady Saxondale saw by the ghastly look which Edmund's countenance now wore, that he was afraid of the horrors of the coming night. She said all she could to strengthen his mind: she bade him remember that no human tongue save his and hers could proclaim the secret; and that if he had nothing to fear at the hands of living beings, it was pure idiotic imbecility to give way to superstitious apprehensions. Edmund was encouraged: but when he again found himself alone in his chamber—when his valet was dismissed—and he, disapparelled, was about to enter his couch—he was seized with such a sudden consternation that he could not have been more terrified if a veritable spectre had sprung up before him. Even as he hastened to leap into his bed, he dreaded lest his foot should be caught by the cold hand of death protruded from beneath it. And now did he indeed enter on another frightful ordeal—an ordeal of hours of mental anguish and hideous imaginings—frightful waking fancies alternating with the dreams of fitful and broken slumbers, wherein the wild cries of dying agony thrilling over the Trent, the ghastly countenance which had been upturned from the cold waters towards him, and all the circumstances of the horrible tragedy were painfully, poignantly, vividly revived. And there was that young nobleman, bearing a proud title—possessed of wealth—couched upon down—environed by velvet and satin draperies—in a magnificently furnished room,—there he was, in a state of mind to be envied only by any wretch whose guilt *was* discovered and who was about to expiate it on the scaffold. But if this were not the reality of Edmund's position, he at least experienced all its horrors in his dreams: for again did he behold the tribunal of justice engaged in a trial for murder, where he figured as the principal—again did he behold the dark and ominous scaffold, with all the appalling *paraphernalia* of death, and himself the criminal about to die!

When the cold wintry morning sent its dull glimmering light in at the casements, it found the young man more ghastly, more haggard than before; and as he looked at himself in the mirror, he recoiled with dismay and affright, so changed had he become. When his valet entered to assist in the morning-toilet, the man could not prevent himself from showing how much he was shocked at his master's appearance: but still he suspected not that it was guilty horror, instead of the immensity of woe, which had thus stamped its terrific traces on Edmund's countenance. On descending to the breakfast-parlour, he found his mother already there; and the instant they were alone, Lady Saxondale said, "You have passed a bad night, Edmund."

"Mother," he answered, "a few more such nights as these will either send me to a mad-house, or else hurry me to the grave. Ah! I can understand how it is that people's hair have turned white in a single night—a statement at which I have often been wont to laugh!"

"Edmund, I will not reproach you," answered Lady Saxondale: "I will not tell you that this is an unmanly cowardice: but I will conjure you to exercise greater control over your feelings. You must do it! At present, those about us give you credit for a natural grief: but grief, the sincerest and the severest, becomes toned down; and if you assume not such a demeanour, suspicions will arise. Bear this in your mind—and let it serve to arm you with courage."

"It must, it must!" murmured Edmund. "Yes—I see that you are right."

Several days passed; and it appeared as if the counsel given by Lady Saxondale, was not entirely thrown away upon Edmund. But then he had discovered the means of defying the horrors of the night—or rather of rendering himself unconscious of them. He drank deeply. Lady Saxondale saw it—permitted it—even encouraged it; and when, more than half intoxicated, he went to his bed at night, she attended him to the door of his chamber,—whispering to the valet, "that grief had made sad havoc with his unfortunate master."

We should observe that before the lid of the coffin containing Adelaide's remains, was screwed down, Lady Saxondale and Edmund proceeded together to the chamber where the corpse lay, ostensibly for the purpose of bestowing a last look on those remains. But this was a piece of mockery in perfect keeping with all the other horrible proceedings that were known only unto their own hearts. When alone together in that room, they did not so much as approach the coffin; Edmund could not even bring himself to throw a single glance at it: but when they came forth again, it was with their kerchiefs to their eyes, as if they were both deeply moved.

The funeral took place with considerable pomp, all the domestics following as mourners, and Edmund at their head. The ceremony was over; and Lady Saxondale thought that now the tomb had closed above the *one* object who was so great a barrier to her complete domination, she had effectually ensured her triumph. But yet she felt and she knew that her power was not consolidated. Madge Somers had not yet been disposed of: Lord Harold Staunton had hitherto found no opportunity of carrying out her instructions. This circumstance caused her much uneasiness: for that woman was possessed of a secret which, if once told, would bring utter ruin down upon the head of this patrician lady who had already consummated so many crimes in order to attain her ends. She must go to London to see Lord Harold again—to devise with him some plan to be immediately executed, if that which he had already suggested should prove impossible. She was uneasy, as we have said—but only uneasy: she was not dispirited—much less did she despair. The blow so recently

struck, had inspired her with renewed confidence in herself and her resources. By that blow she had gained two grand ends at once: she had removed Adelaide from her path, and she had got Edmund completely into her power. One more achievement to get Madge Somers out of the way, and she would be entirely safe!

The day after the funeral she and Edmund set out for London. The young nobleman was far from sorry to leave a spot which was associated with the black crime that he had been induced to commit; and during the journey he recovered as much of his wonted cheerfulness as he dared put on under existing circumstances. His mother continued to preserve her kindness of manner towards him,—yet at the same time acting as the supreme authority in all things, and with just a sufficient display of her will as to prove that she meant to be dominant. Edmund rebelled not. It was not that he exactly said to himself he was in his mother's power: because, after all, crime could not betray crime without drawing down destruction on its own head as well as on that of the one denounced. But the real weakness of Edmund's nature now showed itself in yielding voluntarily to a state of more or less dependence. The fact was, Lady Saxondale, with a consummate art, was making herself necessary to him,—anticipating his wants and wishes, studying his comforts, and in a thousand ways suffering him to perceive that her's was after all a master-spirit to which he had better trust as the means of helping him on through that career which, so to speak, had begun anew from the starting-post of a crime.

They arrived in London,—arrived there, dressed in deep mourning; but beyond the Petersfields, Marlow and Malton, and a *few*—a *very* few other individuals, whom selfish motives rendered the hangers-on of wealthy personages,—they had no friends to come and condole with them on the loss sustained,—assuming such condolence to be acceptable under the circumstances. But for all this Lady Saxondale cared little; and she did her best to prevent Edmund from feeling annoyed at their comparatively isolated position. Indeed, his experience had recently been of this sort; and as his chief sources of enjoyment were now centred in the champagne-bottle and the pleasures of the dinner-table, he was not very difficult to be made contented.

Immediately on their arrival in London, Lady Saxondale sent an intimation of the circumstance to the obscure lodging which, under a feigned name, Lord Harold Staunton was occupying in the vicinage of the Regent's Park; and he delayed not to hasten to the mansion in Park Lane. It was in the evening of the day after her ladyship's return to town with Edmund, that Staunton thus called upon her; and they were at once closeted together to deliberate upon their affairs.

"You look charming, dearest Harriet," said the young nobleman, "in this mourning garb. It becomes you wonderfully; it sets off your grandly handsome figure to the fullest advantage:"—and he threw his arm round her waist as they sat together upon the sofa. "I love you, Harriet——yes, I love you more than ever! And you?"

"I love you also, Harold," she responded, not merely suffering his caresses, but returning them.

For now that Lady Saxondale had no longer a reputation to lose, she had made up her mind to gratify her passions without restraint. Moreover, she had an interest in keeping the young nobleman enchained to her—for she did not intend to fulfil her previously given promise of marrying him: she would never divide with another that power which she had toiled through crimes and waded through iniquities to consolidate: but she would retain him as her paramour, and she knew that by lavishing gold she could not fail to preserve her influence over him.

"And this mourning too," continued Lord Harold, looking significantly in that face upon which he had just been imprinting kisses,—"you are not sorry to wear it under such circumstances?"

"The worst and bitterest enemy I ever encountered," responded Lady Saxondale,—"far worse and far more bitter than even your uncle has proved himself—is now no longer an obstacle in my path. She is gone—and Edmund is completely in my power. He who for a time succeeded in emancipating himself from my shackles, has got them now more closely riven upon his limbs than he had when as a child he dared not attempt to thwart me."

"I understand," observed Harold. "I read in the newspapers the account of how Edmund's wife met her death: and it struck me at the time——"

"Enough! breathe not your thoughts aloud, Harold!" interrupted her ladyship. "Yes—it is so: you have rightly conjectured: there need be no secrets between you and me. Is not Edmund—with his weak and frivolous mind—with his superstitious terrors, and his addiction to the grossest sensualities—is he not completely in my power? But Ah! you know not what else occurred at Saxondale Castle. I dared not write to you upon the subject; and no sooner had I arrived in London the other day, when the letter announcing Adelaide's death summoned me back again; and therefore I had no time to communicate with you."

"But what happened?" inquired Harold, to a certain degree excited by feverish suspense.

"That dress——"

"Ah!" he ejaculated with a quick start; and his countenance became ashy pale.

"Do not be alarmed," his patrician paramour hastened to observe. "Fortunately nothing came of the incident: but at one moment it appeared so frightfully threatening, that I was almost dispossessed of every particle of courage. For, you perceive, as Adelaide knew everything—as Edmund in his weakness and his folly had made her a confidante of all past circumstances—the discovery of that masquerade-dress set her reflecting upon *other* things; and so astute, so cunning was she——"

"I comprehend," said Lord Harold, with a shudder. "She penetrated the mystery of that deed——"

"Yes—she fathomed it; and I fell all of a sudden completely into her power. Ah! there was a moment," continued Lady Saxondale, "when I abandoned myself to despair,—until gradually in my imagination expanded the idea that *she* must be removed. But I ought to observe that the dress fell into the hands of the constable of Gainsborough——"

MAT THE CADGER.

"The constable?" echoed Harold, with another quick start, and flinging his affrighted glances around, as if he apprehended lest the door should burst open and the officers of justice rush in to seize upon him.

"Harold, this is foolish on your part," said Lady Saxondale. "I tell you the danger is past:"—and then she explained the particulars of her interview with the head-constable of Gainsborough.

This led her on to describe the adventures of Chiffin in the chapel—how he was discovered and made prisoner—and how she had effected his release.

"You have passed through a trying ordeal, Harriet," observed Staunton, pressing her towards him.

"Yes: but my power is once again all but consolidated," she answered, with a look of triumph. "There is nothing now to be a source of terror, save and except the one secret which that woman may reveal."

"And this secret," said Lord Harold,—"how is it of such paramount importance? You have never yet informed me: but you have just given me the assurance that henceforth there shall be no concealment of any kind between us."

"Ah, I had forgotten!" responded her ladyship. "This one secret must remain my own—at least for the present. Do not press me, Harold, upon that point."

"I will not—I will not," he answered, so completely enamored by her beauty as he strained her in his arms, that he was entirely submissive to her will.

"And now, relative to this woman," she continued. "What is the latest intelligence you have obtained concerning her?"

"That she still lies completely prostrate—unable to speak—unable even to move her limbs: but the medical attendant confidently predicts her recovery."

"Then, Harold," immediately added Lady Saxondale, "she must be dealt with speedily. While in this state, the opportunity is most favourable for her removal in pursuance of the plan which I myself suggested to you some time since."

"You know, Harriet, the difficulties with which I have had to contend. Ah! if we had only that man Chiffin to aid us——"

"If we had," replied Lady Saxondale, in a musing manner, "it would be settled in one way or another off-hand. Idiot that I was when aiding him to effect his escape, that I did not bid him come up to London and succour you in the business! However, you must carry out the operations immediately. You know not—indeed you know not—how much depends upon it! Even a risk must be run! Surely, surely you can by some means get William Deveril out of the way for a few hours? A forged letter will do this. Ah, the idea is a good one! Know you if your uncle the Marquis is still at Edenbridge?"

"Yes—I have every reason to believe so," replied Harold.

"And can you not imitate his lordship's hand?" asked Lady Saxondale. "Can you not write a pressing letter, as if coming from your uncle, and urging Mr. Deveril to go to him at once? Then, your assistants being in readiness to act——"

"I understand: it shall be done!" ejaculated Staunton. "Yes—it shall be done without delay."

After a little more conversation, Lady Saxondale and her paramour separated,—the latter issuing forth from the mansion.

He was proceeding along Park Lane in order to reach Oxford Street, whence he purposed to take a cab home,—when by the light of a lamp he perceived the form of a man walking rapidly a little way ahead, and keeping as much in the shade as possible,—in short, evidently striving to escape the notice of passers-by.

"Ah!" ejaculated Lord Harold to himself, "the very man who is so needful to me now!"—and quickening his pace, he found that his suspicion was correct, and that the individual thus proceeding stealthily along, was none other than Chiffin the Cannibal.

"My good fellow," said the young nobleman, "it is fortunate I have thus fallen in with you."

"Ah! is it you, my lord?" observed Chiffin, who was at first somewhat alarmed by hearing such quick footsteps, as if they were in pursuit. "And pray what is there in hand? Some little business to be done? No good though, I'll be bound: or else you wouldn't want my assistance."

"There is money to be earned," answered Harold: "and what is more—there is a deed for you to finish, which you once commenced but clumsily left undone."

"And what may that be?" inquired the Cannibal.

"If I mention the name of Madge Somers, you will understand me?"

"Nothing can be plainer, my lord; and when money is to be got and an old spite to be gratified, I'm your man."

"We cannot remain talking here," observed Harold. "Where can we go?"

"Come to my lodging, my lord," responded Chiffin. "It's all safe there: the people are right enough—and there's no danger. Follow me at a distance—and don't lose sight of me."

"Lead on," said Harold: "I shall not miss you."

The Cannibal accordingly proceeded along Park Lane in the direction of Oxford Street. This he rapidly crossed, and soon plunged into Duke Street,—turning thence into a narrow dark alley, where he stopped at the door of a house which, so far as could be judged amidst the obscurity, was of poverty-stricken appearance. Lord Harold speedily joined him; and the Cannibal, letting himself in with a latch-key, conducted the young nobleman up a couple of flights of stairs, into a small back room, where he speedily struck a light. The den was poorly furnished—with a bed, a table, two or three chairs, and some other necessaries: but it seemed a sufficiently secure hiding-place for a person who was so much "wanted" as Mr. Chiffin.

"Sit down, my lord—and make yourself at home," said the Cannibal. "Here's brandy and water. If you've got a cigar you can light it: I don't mind smoke—or more does my landlady, as long as she gets the ready. You see I'm going to blow a cloud:"—and he lighted his pipe accordingly.

"You have had some strange adventures lately,"

observed Harold, looking rather suspiciously around the room, and not feeling over comfortable in the Cannibal's quarters, despite the kind invitation to make himself at home.

"Adventures—ah!" growled Chiffin: "rum 'uns enough too. But as you was in Park Lane, I suppose you have been to see my very particklar and intimate friend her ladyship; and so she has no doubt told you all about it. But adventures are always tumbling down upon me; and a precious one I had this morning too, I can tell you. You see, my lord, I thought this toggery of mine had better be changed: but as I didn't like to walk right bang into a Regent Street tailor's and order a fashionable suit, it struck me as how I would go down to the quarters where those honest folks of Jews deal in second-hand articles. They are not such impudent fellers as to ask any questions if so be they only get their price. So having made up my mind to rig myself out afresh, and convert myself into a real genelman—all the better to get out of the country, which I mean to do as soon as possible—I toddled off towards Houndsditch. I needn't tell your lordship that I don't patronise the great thoroughfares, but keep as much as possible in the back lanes and alleys. That's the way I take my walks. Well, at length I found myself in Houndsditch: and just past Phil's Buildings stands the new Exchange——"

"The Exchange?" ejaculated Lord Harold. "I always thought it was on Cornhill, close by the Bank of England."

"Lord bless your lordship's ignorance!" exclaimed Chiffin. "I didn't mean the Exchange where such tip-top fellers as Rothschild and them sort of coves go. I mean the Jews' Exchange in Houndsditch. It was only built a year or two ago, by a Mr. Isaac; and so you may take your salvation oath he was a Jew by the name. Well, there's a toll at the entrance; and I had to fork out a halfpenny for going in as a buyer. And when I did get in—for I had never been there before in my life—I was astonished!"

"The magnificence of the place, I suppose?" observed Harold.

"Magnificence of fiddlesticks," exclaimed Chiffin. "No—not that. I mean I was astonished at the rum figures I saw, and the lots of toggery spread out on every side. I really fancied the whole twelve tribes of Israel——there was twelve, wasn't there?——Ah, I thought so. Well, the whole of the twelve tribes seemed to be there. Men, and women, and children—all Jews, and no mistake—save and except a few Christians like me, that came as buyers. Your lordship smiles: but I suppose you call yourself a Christian—and why shouldn't I? Howsumever, there I was in the middle of that Exchange, surrounded by such quantities of clothes of all shapes, sizes, and colours, that there was enough to suit and fit a whole tribe of naked Indians, if any of them Missionary Societies should be at a loss for toggery to send out to clothe them with. And such a clatter of voices too—it was as stunning as Babel! Presently I saw one venerable old Jew in a gaberdine—with a long beard—a pair of top-boots in one hand—and his bag over his shoulder; and he looked uncommon suspicious at me, as if he thought I meant to take an advantage of him. The idea of an innocent say-nothing-to-nobody sort of a genelman like me, fancying he could take in a Jew! But I presently recollected that I had seen this identical old file at the *Billy Goat*——that's a public-house in Agar Town; and I got rather funky. For thinks I to myself, the old file might go and peach for the sake of the reward. So, as he was looking at me askance from under his battered old hat, I turned towards a stall: and snatching up a pair of unmentionables, asked the price. A shambling lanky feller of a Jew, with a long frock-coat on that was never made for him,—and he too was carrying a pair of boots in his hand,—asks me thirty shillings, swearing they was dirt cheap and that he would lose by the bargain. I was just telling him, in no very complimentary terms, that I thought it a dead take-in,—when a voice whispered over my shoulder, 'They'll be very cheap, Mr. Chiffin, at a hundred pounds.'—Now, my lord, I'm no coward; I scarce know what cowardice is: but 'pon my soul, any one might have knocked me down with a straw: for without turning my head, I knew uncommon well it was that old rascal of a Jew with the long beard and greasy gaberdine. So then he fronts me: and fixing his piercing eyes upon me, says, says he, 'I know Mr. Chiffin is a genelman, which always has plenty of money about him:'—and then he winked in a knowing manner, so that I couldn't be off guessing what he meant. The fact is, my lord, I did a certain little business at that public-house where I had seen the old Jew——"

"Yes, yes—I know it," interrupted Lord Harold, somewhat impatiently; for he liked as little as might be to have to listen to the Cannibal's story: but at the same time it did not answer his purpose to offend the man. "So I suppose you had to give a large sum of money?"

"Well, my lord," continued Chiffin, "the short and the long of it was that this old Jew whispered to the long lanky feller which was showing me the unmentionables; and they asked me to step along with them to the nearest public-house, where we might talk certain little matters over. I did not dare refuse: they might have raised a hue and cry, and I should have been done for. So we went away together. The old Jew asked for a private room: and when we were all three closeted there, he told me as cool as possible that if I didn't give him every farthing I had about me, he would shout out for the constables. There was a pretty plight for a genelman like me to be in!—and as a matter of course I was as powerless as a child in their hands. I could not even prevent them from searching me as they chose: 'cos why, though I was strong enough to knock 'em both into the middle of next week, or smash 'em up into little bits, yet I didn't dare raise a finger or even look savage, for fear lest they should give the alarm. Well, my lord, as I am telling you, I was just like a child in their hands; and as I've lately made it a rule to carry about with me all I possess—'cos why, I was some time ago robbed by a pal of mine named Tony Wilkins, when I left my money locked up in a cupboard——"

"Then I suppose these Jews plundered you of every farthing?" observed Lord Harold, with an increasing impatience, which he could no longer conceal.

"All except a little loose silver and a few halfpence," replied Chiffin, with a horribly savage ex-

pression of countenance; "and they would not even give me them inexpressibles that I had been bargaining for. So I made the best of my way off from that public-house, and went down to another that I knowed of in Wapping. There I stayed till about a couple of hours back,—when I thought to myself I would just go and call at Saxondale House, and see whether her ladyship was at home: for if so, I knew she wouldn't leave an old friend in trouble and danger. So I tramped all the way from Wapping to Park Lane: but just as I was going to knock at the door, I twigged a couple of constables standing talking close by a lamp-post; and I therefore thought I had better move on a bit. Then your lordship soon after overtook me; and so, as the tale-writers say, I've brought down my history and adventures to the present moment."

"It therefore appears," observed Lord Harold, "that your finances are in no very flourishing condition?"

"As low as they well can be," answered Chiffin. "A many times I have wanted to get clear out of the country, and take my gentility and good looks to America: but somehow or another, things have always turned up to keep me in England, and prevent me from affording the Yankees the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with such a celebrated character as I am. This time, however, if I can only get the wherewith—and which your lordship seems to promise—it won't be very long before I take my departure."

"Then listen," said Lord Harold Staunton: "and I will explain the object which I have in view. That woman of whom I spoke—Madge Somers—still lies an invalid at Mr. Deveril's house. It suits my purpose—no matter why—that she should be removed thence——ultimately to be made away with," added the young nobleman, lowering his voice almost to a whisper.

"Well, my lord, nothing is easier than this," answered Chiffin. "But why not have her made away with on the spot?"

"No: such a deed as *that* would create too tremendous a sensation," rejoined Harold: "whereas, if she be simply borne away in the first instance, those from whose care she is taken will remain in the dark as to her fate; and a letter may be written to them a day or two afterwards, to assure them that the woman is comfortable and in good quarters, but that there are circumstances which render it necessary she should thus be retained in a seclusion which it will be useless for them to make any endeavour to penetrate."

"Have your own way, my lord," responded Chiffin: "it's your concern—not mine; and if you pay, I am bound to follow your lordship's directions. Where is she to be taken to?"

"To some great distance," answered Lord Harold,—"and under circumstances the best calculated to break off all clue to the route thus taken. But," he added, with an ominous expression of countenance, "she is to be made away with! Need I say more on this point?"

"Not a syllable, my lord," responded Chiffin, with a grim look of intelligence.

"But there are other matters with which you must be made acquainted," resumed Harold. "I have already engaged some men to act, when opportunity shall serve, in this business——"

"Who are they?" demanded the Cannibal quickly.

"They bear the euphonious names of Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill," returned Lord Harold.

"I know 'em well," said Chiffin. "How came your lordship to be acquainted with such pleasant and agreeable individuals?"

"Some months ago I was led by curiosity to some horrible den in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane, kept by a certain Widow Burley and her two daughters——"

"Enough!" interrupted the Cannibal. "I understand. Biddy Burley is the mistress of Mat the Cadger, and Polly Burley of Spider Bill. So I suppose you got at these chaps by means of them Burleys?"

"Exactly so," answered Lord Harold. "I presume you will not refuse to act with them? They want a man of your energy to lead them in the matter."

"To be sure they do!" ejaculated Chiffin, with a smile of satisfaction, as if he knew full well that his astuteness and courage must invariably place him at the head of any villanous expedition or iniquitous venture with which he might become connected. "All your lordship has got to do is to tell them to come to me. I know they are to be trusted; and we'll lay our heads together."

Some further conversation took place between the young nobleman and Chiffin the Cannibal;—and the former, having given the latter some money for his present purposes, took his departure.

CHAPTER CLXI.

THE VILLA.

We must now return to the villa near the Regent's Park—that villa which was the home of William and Angela Deveril, and at which Madge Somers still lay upon the bed of illness. The reader has already learnt how she experienced a most serious relapse in consequence of her endeavour to commit to a slate those words which she could not speak with the tongue, but to which she was so impatient to give utterance. Some weeks had now elapsed since that period when she did succeed in committing to the slate this brief and unfinished sentence:—"*William Deveril is the s*——." During that interval her position had been most dangerous; and were it not for the assiduous ministrations of the beauteous Angela, she must have succumbed. The medical man who was in attendance upon her, frequently declared that to Miss Deveril's kind attentions—even more than to his own skill—was the invalid indebted for the prolongation of her life; and that to the same cause she would chiefly owe her recovery, should it eventually take place.

Within the last few days previous to the date to which our narrative has been brought, the medical attendant had been enabled to predict with confidence that she would recover: but still, as Lord Harold had ascertained, she lay prostrate and powerless—speechless—and so weak as scarcely to be able to acknowledge by signs the attentions she received from Miss Deveril. This young lady had

not absented herself from the villa, save for an hour's daily walk with her brother, ever since that brief visit which they paid together to Edenbridge Park, and when Francis Paton avowed his love. But on several occasions Frank had journeyed up from Kent to see his betrothed; and frequent was the epistolary correspondence between them. William Deveril still continued to call regularly upon his charming and well-beloved Florina in Cavendish Square;—and thus stood matters at the time when Lord Harold Staunton encountered Chiffin, as described in the preceding chapter.

It was in the morning of the second day after this encounter, that a letter bearing the Edenbridge post-mark, was delivered at the villa. It was addressed to William Deveril; and its contents were found to be as follow:—

"Edenbridge Park, December 22nd, 1844.

"My dear Deveril,

"Something has transpired which renders it necessary that I should see you to-morrow evening (the 23rd) at the Park. You had better leave London so as to be with us at the dinner-hour. Of course you will stay the night: but if you be anxious to return home soon, I will let you depart on the following day. Do not alarm yourself unnecessarily as to the nature of the business to which I have so distantly alluded: for though of importance, and requiring prompt attention, it need nevertheless excite no apprehension.

"We all join in kindest regards to your amiable sister and yourself; and believe me to remain,

"Your sincere friend,

"EAGLEDEAN."

This letter was received at the villa while the brother and sister were seated at the breakfast-table. William had at once exclaimed that it was from the Marquis of Eagledean,—not merely because he perceived the Edenbridge post-mark, but likewise because he fancied that it was his lordship's handwriting. But as he read the letter, his countenance gradually expressed a look of suspicion and mistrust,—so that Angela observed him with an increasing degree of anxiety.

"I hope, dear brother, there is nothing wrong?" she said.

"Read for yourself, Angela," he answered, giving her the letter. "And now what do you think?" he inquired when she had perused it.

"There certainly appears something strange in the wording of the contents," replied Angela, also mystified and suspicious: "and yet it is his lordship's handwriting—here too is the Edenbridge postmark——

"But observe, my dear sister," interrupted our young hero. "This letter addresses me as '*My dear Deveril*,'—whereas the Marquis invariably writes to me as '*My dear William*.' It speaks of '*kindest regards*,' whereas the term is wont to be either '*most affectionate regards*' or '*kindest love*:' and instead of '*your sincere friend*,' his lordship is accustomed to subscribe himself '*Your's affectionately*,' or '*Your affectionate friend*.' Trivial as the variations in this letter may seem from his lordship's habitual manner of communicating with me, they are nevertheless important when a suspicion is excited."

"True!" observed Angela, thoughtfully as well as anxiously. "But what do you suspect?"

"I know not, dear sister: and yet I am afraid that some treachery is at the bottom of this note. Indeed," he continued, having taken up the letter again and considered it attentively, "I am now all but convinced that this is not even the handwriting of the Marquis, excellent though the imitation be. Angela, it is a forgery—I feel convinced of it! and there *is* a treacherous intent in some quarter!"

The young maiden grew very much alarmed: but her brother hastened to reassure her, by observing, "It would be much worse, Angela, if our suspicions had not been thus excited, and if in blind confidence I were to plunge headlong into the snare, whatsoever it may be, that is set for me. The object evidently is to get me away from home during the ensuing night: hence the recommendation to be at Edenbridge by the dinner-hour—so that it is doubtless calculated I could not get back again, on discovering the deceit, until long past midnight."

"And what will you do, William?" asked Angela, still with a trepidation of anxiety, though considerably reassured by what her brother had just said.

"What shall I do?" said William, thoughtfully repeating the question thus put to him: and then for a few moments he reflected deeply. "I tell you what I will do, Angela: I will start off at once for Edenbridge, and clear up all uncertainty as to the genuineness or fabrication of the letter If it be a forgery—as we have so much reason to suspect—I will return home at once. I can easily come back by three or four o'clock; and then aided by the advice which the Marquis will in the meantime have given me, I shall know how to act. You need be under no apprehension during my absence. Whatsoever treachery may be in contemplation, is to be reserved for the night-time. That is evident. Therefore fear not, my sweet sister. Not for an instant would I leave you unprotected, if I thought there was any danger."

Having embraced Angela, William Deveril issued forth from the villa. As he traversed the little garden in front, the old gardener, who appeared to be busy at work, stopped him with the accustomed touch of the hat; and asked him a question of a trivial nature in connexion with some shrub. William was about to hurry past, telling him that he had not time to attend to the matter at that moment,—when it struck him that the gardener surveyed him in a somewhat singular manner; and as this was not the first time that the same suspicion had occurred to our hero, he did stop and answered his questions.

"I see you are in a hurry now, sir," said the man; "or else I had several other things I wanted to speak to you about in connexion with the garden. But as I suppose you won't be more than an hour or two absent, as usual, I will wait till your return."

"You had better tell me now what you have to say," answered Deveril: "for I have some business which may detain me in town; and when I come home in the afternoon, I must be off at once to Edenbridge. I have received a letter from the Marquis of Eagledean, inviting me to dine with him this evening."

While affecting to have his eyes fixed upon the particular shrubs to which the gardener had alluded, William was all the time scrutinising, from beneath his long dark lashes, the countenance of the old man; and his original suspicion was con-

firmed, that this individual was in some way or another connected with the treachery which was being secretly plotted—that is to say, supposing his surmise to be correct that the letter from Edenbridge was a forgery. He remained conversing with the gardener for a few minutes; and then, pretending to have forgotten something, he re-entered the villa.

"My dear Angela," he said, "I feel convinced that there is something wrong about that gardener. I have frequently told you that he has for some weeks past come much oftener than he was bound to do according to the terms of our contract for keeping the garden in order—much oftener too than the garden itself requires at this season of the year. He has lingered and loitered about at times in a manner that struck me to be strange; and with an air of good-humoured familiarity he has frequently endeavoured to get me into conversation when I have been going out, as if he sought to learn whither I was proceeding and how long I should be absent. Just now his manner struck me as more than usually peculiar. In a word, I believe him to be a spy——But fear not, Angela! Whoever our enemies may be, we will outwit them; and whatsoever may be their design, we will frustrate it."

"Do not think, William, that my fortitude will fail," responded his sister. "It is for you to adopt the course that you may think fit: I will remain here tranquilly until your return."

"You would do well, dearest Angela, not to breathe a word to the maid-servants that anything unusual has occurred. Go about your avocations with the same demeanour as heretofore. On the part of neither of us must the least evidence be shown that we suspect anything;—so that the gardener, if he be really a spy, may go and inform his employers that this morning's letter has thrown us completely off our guard."

Angela promised compliance with her brother's instructions; and he then departed. Proceeding at once to the railway station, he took the first train to Edenbridge,—reaching the Park soon after mid-day. The Marquis at once pronounced the letter to be a forgery,—thus confirming Deveril's preconceived suspicion.

"But who can have done this?" asked our young hero: "who can my enemies be? and what object can they have in view?"

"These are questions," replied the Marquis of Eagledean, gravely, and after nearly a minute's consideration, "which naturally lead us to retrospect over past occurrences, and bring events to our minds, showing us who have acted in a hostile spirit on former occasions. Alas! I fear that my graceless nephew Harold has not abandoned the career of wickedness: for I have recently received letters from Stockholm, which acquaint me that he is not in that city,—a piece of intelligence which seems to be confirmed by the fact that he has neither written to me, nor drawn for any pecuniary supplies. Yet it is difficult to conceive how he can entertain any perfidious intent with regard to your affairs."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated William; "if he were infamous enough to harbour the intent of carrying off Angela? He has seen her at the Opera: who knows but that he may have conceived a passion for her?"

"Or it may be," suggested the Marquis, "that there is something connected with that woman who has for so long a time been harboured at your abode. We know that she has some secret of the deepest importance to reveal—a secret intimately concerning yourself: but may not this secret likewise regard others, and even threaten to compromise them? If so, whatsoever hostile designs are in contemplation, may be levelled against her. It is however useless for us to waste time in conjecture: we must determine how to act."

It is not however necessary to record in this place the nature of the measures which were promptly resolved upon. Suffice it to say that a little past three o'clock in the afternoon William Deveril reached his villa near the Regent's Park. It was now verging towards the dusk, which sets in early at that season of the year; but the old gardener was still occupied with the shrubs and the plants, which certainly needed not so much care as he seemed intent on lavishing upon them. William was however careful, as he passed him by, not to show, by any change of demeanour towards the old man, that he suspected him of treachery: neither did he exhibit the haste and excitement of one who had just come from a journey. He entered the villa, and was speedily closeted with Angela. From her he learnt that scarcely had he taken his departure in the morning, when the gardener went away and did not return for an hour: but that ever since he had remained about the premises, to all appearance busily engaged. Deveril then informed his sister of all that had taken place at Edenbridge Park—how he had received the confirmation that the letter was a forgery—and how the Marquis had suggested certain measures which were to be adopted, not merely for the frustration of whatsoever treachery was being plotted, but likewise for the capture of its perpetrators.

It was now close upon four o'clock; and Deveril prepared to leave the house, as if he were on the point of proceeding to Edenbridge according to the intimation he had given to the old gardener. Angela learnt from one of the maids—who accidentally mentioned the circumstance—that the gardener was seated in the kitchen, to warm himself, as he said, after a hard and cold day's work. Angela lost no time in reporting this to her brother,—who remarked, "Yes, everything confirms my belief that he is a spy; and the circumstance of his remaining in the house is a mere pretext to enable him to watch whether I really take my departure or not. I will however do something that shall lull him still more deeply into such a belief."

Thereupon our hero descended to the kitchen premises, on some pretence or another; and when the old gardener saw him, he said, with that air of good-humoured familiarity which for some time past he had adopted, and which a person of his years might assume, "You will be late for the dinner, sir, at Edenbridge Park."

"Not so," responded William. "It is now only four: a cab will take me to the station in an hour—the train starts at five—and I shall reach my destination at half-past six. His lordship's dinner hour is seven."

Deveril then ascended to the hall—whispered a few hasty words to his sister, bidding her be of good cheer—and issued forth from the house, having a brace of pistols secured about his person.

We must now pass over a few hours, and suppose it to be about ten o'clock at night. In an up-stairs room—in a low public-house, situated in one of the worst streets in the worst part of Camden Town—four persons were assembled. These were Chiffin the Cannibal, Mat the Cadger, Spider Bill, and the old gardener. Of the first-mentioned of these worthies, it is by no means necessary to give the reader the slightest description: but of the second something may be said, inasmuch as he was a peculiar-looking person in his way. He was accustomed to dress in a sort of sporting style, but always in such shabby, greasy, sordid garments, that he might have been taken for a broken-down horse-chaunter. Sometimes he wore top-boots—sometimes gaiters—but always corduroy breeches, very loose and baggy. A fustian shooting-jacket, or else a cut-away green coat, with tarnished metal buttons, constituted the varieties of this portion of his costume: his waistcoat, which was generally of that green and yellow striped material worn by stablemen, came very far below his waist. A blue kerchief spotted with white, better known as a "bird's-eye," was loosely folded several times round his neck, the ends being crossed over the front of a shirt which did not bear too narrow a scrutiny in respect to cleanliness. This neckerchief came nearly up to his mouth so that his chin was usually buried in it altogether; and this was not merely the case in winter when it was cold, but likewise in the summer, even in the dog-days. His hat was a sort of chimney-pot shape, but having seen such good service that the crown bulged upward, thus giving a conical appearance to the article. He was of middle height—strongly built—of muscular development and compact proportions. The expression of his countenance was that of thorough determination: indeed a more daring, resolute-looking kind of a person it would be difficult to meet; and in this respect he quite equalled Chiffin the Cannibal. His eyes were dark and piercing: he had a snub nose—a very wide mouth—short ragged whiskers;—and his hair was so uneven that it appeared to have been hacked about by a pair of blunt scissors wielded by some drunken barber, the last time it was cut. He had a habit of resting his right hand upon his hip and assuming an attitude of boldest decision when engaged in conversation; and he likewise looked fixedly up with an insolent stare of defiance in the countenance of whomsoever he might wish to make an impression upon. In his earlier years he had been connected with the turf,—expending thereon the few hundreds of pounds which he inherited at the death of his father, who was a tradesman. He had then hung on, for some time, to the skirts, so to speak, of those individuals with whom his sporting proceedings had thrown him in contact: so that he was said to have "cadged" for his living—hence the surname he had acquired. Of late years however he had sunk down very low, and had turned his hand to anything desperate—had fallen amongst the vilest of associates—had become the flash man of such a disgusting woman as one of Widow Burley's daughters—and might therefore be classed amongst the foul refuse and most loathsome sweepings to be found in the great moral sewer which constitutes more than half of the modern Babylon.

As the above is no imaginary character, we have taken some little pains to describe him. In respect to Spider Bill, we need say no more than that he was so called from his peculiar shape and an extreme lanky length of limb. He also was as desperate a character as Chiffin the Cannibal or Mat the Cadger, and therefore well fitted to be their associate in any criminal undertaking.

We say it was ten o'clock; and those three villains, together with the old gardener, were drinking and smoking in the private room at the public-house where we find them thus grouped together.

"Well," said Mat the Cadger, appealing to Chiffin, "I should think it is pretty near time for us to be off. The clock down stairs has just struck ten; and it's a good twenty minutes walk towards the villa. Besides which, we must separate and go different ways."

"We will be off directly," answered Chiffin: "but don't you dictate, old feller: 'cos why, I'm in command now."

"I suppose there isn't no doubt of it's all being square and straightfor'ard this time," observed Spider Bill: "for there's been so many puts-off during I don't know how many weeks past——"

"To be sure!" growled Chiffin: "'cos why, Lord Harold is a muff in these things—and you chaps ain't much better. But here, you see, I have only been in the business two or three days, and it's going to be done as nice as possible. But I say, you feller," he added, turning to the gardener,—"you're certain sure that it's all right at the villa—eh?"

"I've told you so a dozen times," was the old man's response. "I'm certain that Deveril suspects nothing."

"But what do you think Mr. Deveril could have been about, all that while absent from home from ten in the morning till three in the afternoon?" inquired Chiffin.

"Why—courting, to be sure, down in Cavendish Square," replied the gardener; "and perhaps attending to business of some kind or another. But I'll answer for it that there's nothing wrong; because I waited in the garden, as I've told you, till he came back at three o'clock; and he spoke as friendly and looked as happy as ever. Besides, didn't I tell you that I went into the kitchen and stopped till he set off to go to Edenbridge. He came down to get his upper coat brushed, and told me he was just about to start. In a word, when I went and told Lord Harold in the forenoon that all was right, I made sure it was; and so you will find it to be."

"Well, we'll take it for granted it is so," said Chiffin. "It isn't that I'm afraid, you know," he added, with a grim look as he glanced slowly round upon his companions: "but I don't like such a thing as a failure; and as we've only got half our reward paid down, and are to have t'other half when the job's done, I want to make as sure of the last as I am of the first!"—and here he significantly tapped his pocket.

"Of course," observed Mat the Cadger, with an assenting nod.

"Then let's be off," said the Cannibal. "We don't want your services any more, old chap," he added, turning to the gardener: "so to you we say good bye."

The villains then issued forth one by one, and at intervals of a few minutes, from the public-house,—the three who were to be actively employed in the enterprise, taking different directions to gain the point of meeting, which had been already settled. This was in a narrow and dark lane at no great distance from Deveril's house; and there a covered spring-cart was waiting. The horse attached to it, was a strongly built as well as fleet animal; and a man in Lord Harold's pay was in charge of this equipage. Close by, too, Lord Harold himself was waiting. Enveloped in a rough pea-coat, and with a glazed hat, the large brims of which slouched over his countenance, he was pacing to and fro with some degree of impatience, the time for the appearance of his agents having elapsed by some minutes. At length they came one by one; and Chiffin, who was the first upon the spot, assured his lordship that it was all right, for he had been closely questioning the gardener upon the subject.

"Then let us to work at once," said the young nobleman: "because when Deveril got to Edenbridge and found out that the letter was all a trick, he would naturally take the Marquis's carriage-and-four and return home. But that would make it past eleven o'clock; and so there is plenty of time, if we are expeditious."

"But about the up-trains, my lord?" said Chiffin inquiringly.

"I took good care to ascertain," responded Harold, "that there are none which could serve his purpose so as to bring him up in time to interfere with us. Now then, you fellows, go on together: we will follow with the vehicle exactly five minutes after you leave, so that it won't have to stand long at the gate of the premises."

"Five minutes in advance will be ample," responded Chiffin. "If the inmates are in bed, we'll break into the house in a jiffy: but if they're still up it will be easier work still."

Having thus spoken, Chiffin led the way from the spot, closely followed by Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill; and in three minutes they were at the villa. The hall-lamp was still alight; and a candle was also burning in an up-stairs room—so that it was evident the inmates had *not* yet retired to rest. Chiffin's dispositions were speedily made: he was to enter by the front door, while his two companions were to effect their entry by the back part of the premises, and thus as it were take the place by storm. They were provided with black masks, which they put upon their countenances previous to commencing operations.

We will first follow Chiffin. He traversed the front garden and rang the house-bell,—having done which, he turned his back towards the door, so that the instant it should be opened the servant answering the summons, might not at the first glimpse catch sight of his mask. He was not kept long waiting: the door was opened—he made one step backward—caught the female by the throat—and kicked the door to with marvellous rapidity.

"Not a word! not a struggle!" he said, in the low hoarse whisper of his terrible voice: "or I'll throttle you!"

There was scarcely any need for this injunction, inasmuch as the young woman at once swooned with the awful terror which seized upon her.

Meanwhile Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill had leapt over the wall at the back of the premises; and stealing into the kitchen, they found the other two female servants (for the Deveril's kept three) seated at work. Mat sprang upon one—his companion on the other. The first who was thus assailed, gave vent to a slight scream—but only a slight one; for it was instantaneously stifled by the rude hand that gagged her lips:—while the other female was seized with too profound a dismay to cry out at all. They both received the hurried assurance that if they remained quiet no harm would befall them. Almost immediately afterwards footsteps were heard descending the stairs; and Chiffin appeared, bearing the inanimate form of the housemaid who had answered the door.

"Now then," he said, with growling hastiness of tone, "let us put these women into some secure nook—and then for the rest of the business. Ah! there's the coal-cellar quite handy!"—and forthwith the door of that place was opened.

The two women who had not fainted, but over whose mouths rough hands were forcibly held, showed by their looks how wild was their terror. The villains repeated their assurances that no harm would befall them if they remained quiet: but they likewise vowed that the slightest scream would be instantaneously followed by the murder of all three. They were accordingly thrust into the coal-cellar; and the bolt was drawn upon them.

"Now then for up-stairs," said Chiffin: and he led the way, followed by his two accomplices.

As there had been no light perceived in the ground-floor rooms, they did not think it worth while to enter them: but they crept up towards that where the Cannibal had seen a candle burning. Angela—who was seated there, by the bed-side of Madge Somers,—heard the footsteps; and though a tremor shot through her form, she was not so much frightened as might have been expected:—perhaps she knew that succour was near. She rose up from her chair—and the next instant the three ruffians with the black masks rushed into the room.

"Not a word, or you're dead!" ejaculated Mat the Cadger, as he caught hold of the young lady with one hand, and with the other produced a pistol from his pocket.

The sight of that weapon did strike a horrible alarm to the soul of Angela. Mat the Cadger forced her down into the chair—whipped out a cord from his pocket—and in a moment bound her arms to the back of the seat,—at the same time renewing his horrible threats. While this was doing, Chiffin and Spider Bill seized upon Madge Somers and tore her from the bed. All this was the work of a few instants; and as a shriek did now vibrate from Angela's lips, Mat the Cadger placed the muzzle of his pistol close to her fair polished brow,—declaring, with a horrible imprecation, that he would blow her brains out if she did not hold her tongue.

But at this instant there was a hasty rush of footsteps up the stairs: and the next moment William Deveril, Don Diego Christoval, the young Lord Everton, and the Marquis of Eagledean made their appearance, each presenting pistols and bidding the villains surrender. Chiffin the Cannibal

and Spider Bill dropped Madge Somers upon the carpet: but at the same instant the former was seized upon by the powerful arms of Count Christoval and hurled upon the floor—while Spider Bill was simultaneously overpowered by William Deveril. Mat the Cadger, dropping his weapon, made one rush to the casement—tore it open—and precipitated himself forth, just as Lord Everton clutched him by the skirts of his coat; so that it was a miracle the young nobleman was not dragged forth after him. The villain alighted upon a border under the window; and instantaneously picking himself up, rushed madly away. Almost immediately afterwards a vehicle might have been heard driving quickly off: for Lord Harold, who was so stationed below that he could command a view of that window, on perceiving this sudden descent and flight of Mat the Cadger, comprehended in a moment that the project had failed. He therefore hurried off the vehicle—while he himself fled precipitately in another direction, and in the wildest excitement lest the officers of justice should be upon his heels.

We must now for a few instants descend to the lower part of the premises, to announce that the captivity of the female-servants was not of long duration: for the door of the cellar was quickly opened by Francis Paton, who besought the terrified women not to give way to their alarms, nor do anything to raise the neighbourhood, as there were others in the house who would prevent any farther ruffianism on the part of the intruders. Leaving the lady's-maid and cook to recover the housemaid from her swoon, Francis sped up-stairs—where the following spectacle at once met his eyes. While young Lord Everton had quickly closed the casement again, the Marquis of Eagledean cut the cords which bound Angela to the chair; and he then hastened to assist her in lifting Madge Somers back into the bed from which she had been

so rudely torn. Just outside the threshold, Don Diego Christoval had one knee upon Chiffin's chest, a hand at his throat, and a pistol at his head; the mask had fallen from the ruffian's countenance, which wore a horrible expression of mingled rage, hate, and doggedness. Just inside that same threshold, Spider Bill was likewise upon the floor: his mask had also come off, and he looked terribly crestfallen and frightened, as William Deveril kept him down in a similar manner to that adopted by the Spanish nobleman in respect to Chiffin.

"Search this fellow, Frank!" said Don Diego; "and take from him whatsoever weapons he may have about him."

The Cannibal's pistols and clasp-knife were speedily drawn forth from his pockets by Francis Paton: while Adolphus (Lord Everton) also disarmed Spider Bill.

"Now," said the Marquis of Eagledean, who had assisted Angela to replace Madge Somers in the couch, "let these two men be conducted down stairs; and let them understand well that at the slightest attempt at resistance, they will be shot through the head. Remorseless ruffians that they are, we may not hesitate to treat them as dogs if they thus provoke us!"

Don Diego Christoval and William Deveril accordingly suffered their prisoners to rise; and the room being soon cleared, Angela remained with Madge Somers,—who, having swooned off at first, was now rapidly recovering. In dogged sullenness did Chiffin descend the stairs: while Spider Bill appealed for mercy as he was made to follow.

"Silence!" exclaimed the Marquis of Eagledean, in answer to the latter's entreaties: "you will hear what we have to say—and according as you respond to our queries, shall we deal with you."

The parlour on the ground-floor was reached—the lamp was lighted—and the prisoners were placed in such a position that they could not possibly escape from the guardianship of those who now had them in custody. We should not however forget to observe that ere descending from the chamber above, Francis Paton had lingered behind the rest for a single moment, to exchange a warm pressure of the hand and a fond look with Angela, in congratulation of the issue of this perilous adventure.

Perhaps also, ere resuming the thread of the narrative, it may be as well to pause for a few moments and describe how it was that such speedy succour was at hand. As the reader will have seen, the Marquis entertained the suspicion that his nephew Lord Harold had some connexion with the impending treachery: for he thought he could discover traces of the young nobleman's writing in the imitation of his own hand in the forged letter. Judging from antecedent circumstances, he had come to the conclusion that if his nephew were really so connected with the plot, whatever it might be,—Lady Saxondale was also sure to be in it. It was therefore necessary to fathom the whole proceeding to the very bottom; and, still anxious to save his nephew from the ignominy of figuring in a criminal tribunal, the Marquis of Eagledean had decided upon adopting the measure of watching inside the villa, so as to not merely frustrate the intended treachery, but also capture whomsoever might be found entering the premises. That there would not be many persons whose arrival might be thus expected, was naturally judged from the circumstance that means had been taken to get William Deveril out of the way, so that only a few women would have to be dealt with. The nature of the arrangement devised by the Marquis had been duly communicated to Angela by her brother, when he returned from Edenbridge. Indeed he came up to London from the Park with the Marquis, Lord Everton, Francis Paton, and Count Christoval,—this last-mentioned personage being on a visit there at the time. Nothing however was said to the female servants at the villa,—for fear lest at the very first alarm they should be led to call out for succour notwithstanding any injunctions to the contrary, and thus prompt the expected intruders to take to a precipitate flight—thereby frustrating the hope of the Marquis to make them prisoners and fathom the entire proceeding to the bottom. It was regarded as a matter of certainty that blood would not be shed uselessly by the agents of the dark and mysterious treachery which was impending,—and that whosoever came would be contented with binding the female servants and intimidating them by threats into silence.

Such were the calculations, the motives, and the plans of the Marquis of Eagledean. We should further observe that, at about ten o'clock, Angela, who was on the watch, descended gently from the sick woman's room, while the servants were in the kitchen; and noiselessly opening the front door, she gave admittance to her brother, the Marquis, the Count, Adolphus, and Francis Paton,—who all five forthwith ensconced themselves in the breakfast-parlour leading out of the hall; and there they remained in the dark until the time for action arrived. Of what followed, the reader is already aware: the whole scheme, as arranged by the Marquis, ended in success, and without the intervention of the police—an alternative which he had been so anxious to avoid. But he did not anticipate to encounter in one of the ruffians, Chiffin the Cannibal, whom he presumed to be at the time far away across the sea, on the American soil.

We may now resume the thread of our narrative, and describe what took place between the prisoners and their captors in the parlour.

"You have been taken," said the Marquis of Eagledean, addressing the two prisoners, "in an attempt to carry off an unfortunate invalid woman, whom *your* knife,"—and here he fixed his eyes upon the Cannibal,—"nearly devoted to death. This is a proceeding of so extraordinary as well as outrageous a nature, that it must have had no unimportant instigation. As I have already observed, we shall deal with you according to your answers to my questions."

"And what if we confess everything?" demanded Spider Bill eagerly.

The Marquis of Eagledean did not immediately reply: his soul revolted from the idea of again letting loose the Cannibal upon society:—and yet when he reflected upon all the reasons which his daughter Elizabeth Paton had advanced against making an enemy of Chiffin at that time when he was entrapped by her stratagem at Edenbridge Park, he felt that he could not do otherwise than let the man go. But while reduced to this alternative, he made up his mind on the present occa-

sion to adopt some measure to ensure the ruffian's departure from England.

"If you confess everything," he accordingly said, in answer to Spider Bill's question, "no harm shall befall you."

"And does that apply to me, my lord?" asked Chiffin, in a sullen growling voice.

"Yes," was the response.

"Well then, here goes for confession!" exclaimed the Cannibal, with a savage exultation. "It was your lordship's own nephew, Lord Harold Staunton, which got up all this business."

"Yes—that it was!" cried Spider Bill: "and what's more, me and that man which bolted just now, have been upon the watch for I don't know how many weeks to do the job. But you, sir," turning to William Deveril, "was always in the way——"

"Ah! while I bethink me," observed our hero, "was not that gardener of mine privy to what was going on?"

"He was, sir," rejoined Spider Bill.

At this moment the door opened; and Angela made her appearance, with a singularly excited expression of countenance. She beckoned William Deveril to follow her; and the Marquis of Eagledean, thinking that something of importance had occurred, accompanied his young friend from the room; but not before he had made a sign to Count Christoval, Lord Everton, and Frank, to keep a strict guard over the prisoners.

The Marquis and William Deveril accompanied Angela into the breakfast parlour, whither she led them, and where a light was now burning. They both noticed that she still continued to manifest a considerable degree of excitement: there was a visible tremor throughout her charming form; and she flung quick as well as singular glances upon Deveril,—glances in which a certain degree of timidity and bashfulness was blended with that excitement which was inspiring her.

"What has happened, Angela?" inquired the Marquis, quickly.

"Hasten to tell us, dear sister?" exclaimed Deveril, also in acute suspense.

"Sister!"—and she echoed the word in a strange and involuntary manner: then with considerable rapidity of utterance, she went on to say, "The woman has recovered the faculty of speech. Doubtless the shock which she has sustained, produced a strong revulsion in her entire being——But no matter what may be the cause: the effect is as I tell you—and it is indeed of stupendous importance to *you*, William! It however seems to me like a dream——I am afraid my thoughts are bewildered——perhaps I heard not aright—and yet she spoke plainly—I made her repeat the words. But come you both, and hear them with your own ears, and from her own lips, that you may judge for yourselves."

Having thus spoken, Angela issued quickly from the room,—while the Marquis of Eagledean and William Deveril, exchanging rapid glances of wonderment and suspense, hastened to follow her. They both felt that they were upon the threshold of the knowledge of some grand and important secret: but neither of them could form the slightest conjecture what it might be. Still under the influence of a strange and wild excitement, Angela tripped up the stairs, and conducted William and the Marquis into the invalid's chamber. Madge Somers was now propped up with several pillows; and there was a faint hectic tinge of excitement upon the haggard hollow cheeks—or rather upon the sallow skin where the cheek-bones were prominent. Her eyes lighted up with an expression of joyous satisfaction, as she encountered the looks of William Deveril, whom she beckoned to approach close to the couch.

"Now," said Angela, her voice losing somewhat of its excitement in the gentle kindness with which she habitually spoke to the invalid,—"repeat those words which you ere now breathed twice in my ears."

"I will," responded the woman, in a faint, feeble, and almost dying tone—but still one that was clearly audible, as well as unmistakable in the syllables to which it gave utterance: then, fixing her eyes steadfastly upon our young hero, she said, "Prepare yourself to hear that solemn truth which I am about to proclaim, and which I see that Miss Deveril has not ventured to communicate——Prepare yourself, I say: for it is a truth that will startle you with the wildest amazement! You are not the brother of this amiable and excellent young lady—you are not the child of the poor wandering players——you are the son of Lady Saxondale!"

CHAPTER CLXII.

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR OF SAXONDALE.

Wild indeed was the amazement experienced by our hero at this intelligence—an amazement which was to an equal extent felt by the Marquis of Eagledean. So powerful a sensation of faintness almost immediately seized upon our hero, that he staggered back, and was compelled to lean against the wall for support. Angela, perceiving how great was the effect which the announcement had produced upon him, hastened to bear him a tumbler of water: but it was with a sort of timid bashfulness that she presented it. He drained its contents: then, observing the expression of her countenance, and instantaneously comprehending what was passing in her mind, he caught her in his arms,—exclaiming, "Oh, dearest Angela! even if all this be not a dream—if it be not a fevered fancy on the part of that poor woman—if, in a word, it be a stern and solemn truth,—you are not the less my sister! For think you that any circumstances could possibly diminish the brotherly love which I bear towards you? No—never, never, my darling Angela!"

The young lady wept profusely as she received these assurances; and the Marquis of Eagledean was likewise much affected.

"If it be a dream?" exclaimed Madge Somers, speaking in a much stronger and more excited tone than at first. "No, no—it is not a dream! Have you not the mark of a strawberry upon your shoulder?"

"Yes!" ejaculated our hero. "Here!"—and he placed his hand upon the spot.

"To be sure," continued Madge. "I saw it when you were at that cottage in Lincolnshire, at the time you so generously saved my life from the waters of the Trent."

"But that young man, then," said the Marquis of Eagledean, scarcely yet recovered from the bewilderment into which he had been thrown,—"that young man, I say, who passes before the world as Lord Saxondale?"

"That young man," answered Madge Somers, in a solemn voice and with a corresponding expression of the countenance, "is my own son!"

Here was another subject for ineffable astonishment; and for some moments not another word was spoken: but those who were present in that room, surveyed each other with a sort of solemn awe, as if they deeply felt how mysteriously and inscrutably the ways of Providence are worked out. But at length the Marquis of Eagledean, breaking that silence, began to question Madge Somers farther. A faintness had however now come over the woman: a reaction set in from the excitement which for the last few minutes she had undergone; and she only shook her head to indicate that she was no longer able to exercise the faculty of speech.

"She must be kept quiet," suggested Angela. "I know full well how to treat her: leave her in my hands. But perhaps, dear William," continued the young lady, drawing our hero aside, and speaking in a whispering voice,—"for after the kind and considerate assurances you have given me, I shall still call you by that name—I shall still address you as a brother——"

"Oh, Angela! infinite would be my affliction," responded our hero, "if you were to treat me otherwise:"—and taking her hand, he pressed it with the most affectionate warmth. "Now continue, my dear sister—for as such you must ever be regarded by me: continue, I say, the suggestions you were about to offer."

"It is but too evident," proceeded Angela, "that this poor woman has for long years been privy to a foul wrong committed towards yourself: but she is penitent—she is anxious to make all possible amends—and it will doubtless contribute towards her mental peace, and therefore to her physical recovery, if you give her some assurance——"

"I comprehend you, dearest Angela—and I admire more than ever the noble generosity of your heart:"—then approaching the bed, our hero took the emaciated hand of the invalid, and said in a solemn voice, "Here, in the presence of her whom I love as a very dear sister—in the presence of that nobleman who has been to us both the most generous of friends—and likewise with an attesting heaven to listen to my words,—do I declare that I forgive you, my poor woman, for whatsoever wrong you may have done me!——Yes, I forgive you—and may God forgive you likewise!"

"My lord," murmured Madge Somers, now again for a few moments recovering the faculty of speech, "this generosity on your part is more than I could have expected. But as through me you have for many years been deprived of your rights, it is a satisfaction amounting to a bliss that I should be the first at length to salute you by that title which is properly and truly your's, and which the law will recognise. For as I have a soul to be saved, you are the rightful heir of Saxondale—and may heaven give you long life to bear that proud name which though desecrated in others, will be honoured in you!"

Madge Somers was again overcome by the transitory paroxysm of excitement which had enabled her to give utterance to that speech; and Angela made a sign of entreaty that our hero and the Marquis of Eagledean would now withdraw. They did so: and on descending the stairs, the former drew the Marquis into the breakfast-parlour—closing the door, so that they were alone there together.

"Now, my dear young friend," said Lord Eagledean, embracing our hero with an affection truly paternal—"let me congratulate you upon the knowledge of a momentous secret which gives you that title and that wealth from which you have been so long and so iniquitously debarred!"

"My dear lord," was the young nobleman's response, "accept my fervent gratitude for these congratulations which you proffer me; but my mind is made up to one thing:"—and he spoke in a tone expressive of the firmest resolve, while his countenance corroborated his words.

"You do not mean to tell me," cried the Marquis, more than half-suspecting what he was about to hear, "that you reject——"

"I mean, my generous friend," interrupted our hero, "that I shall continue plain and simple William Deverl. By that name therefore I beseech you to address me as heretofore: nor to those in the other room—no, not even to your own son—must be revealed that secret which we have just learnt!"

"This is madness! this is impossible!" ejaculated the Marquis vehemently: and he even spoke in anger—the first time that ever he had been angry with our hero.

"Do not reproach me, my best of friends," said the young man entreatingly, but still with an expression of firmest resolve upon his countenance. "Give me your attention—I will explain my motives for that course on which I am inflexibly determined; and your own kind heart will sympathise with my feelings."

"Proceed," said the Marquis, but with a voice and manner which showed that it would be difficult indeed to bring him over to his young friend's views.

"Has it not occurred to you," resumed the latter, "that if I profit by the information which we have just received from that woman's lips, I bring down utter ruin upon my own mother? Is it not but too evident that she—the authoress of my being—has perpetrated——I cannot speak the word!"

"The foulest of crimes!" ejaculated the Marquis, almost fiercely. "She has brought up a stranger to supplant her own offspring! Yes—there can be no doubt that you will involve her in ruin: but really, my young friend, this is a case in which you cannot stand upon such punctilios. There breathes not a man who would more earnestly inculcate the necessity of filial love, and duty, and forbearance towards a mother——but such a mother!"

"Nevertheless," added our hero, "she is *still* my mother; and not for worlds would I adopt measures which must hold her up to the scorn and the execration of the whole world——nay, more—measures that would compel the law to take cognisance of her misdeed and visit her with some terrible punishment!"

"Admirable young man!" exclaimed the Marquis of Eagledean, his better feelings bursting forth with a gush of enthusiasm that absorbed his transitory resentment and impatience, and sent forth tears from his eyes.

"Oh! I am rejoiced," exclaimed William Deveril—for such we must continue to call him, inasmuch as it was his own will to be so denominated,—"I rejoice to perceive that you at last yield to the strength of my reasoning, and that you no longer oppose the course which I am resolved to adopt."

"But will you not make your mother aware," inquired the Marquis, "that you are acquainted with the secret of your birth?"

"Yes—assuredly," answered Deveril: "because it is evident that she fears the revelation which the invalid woman has made to us——"

"And perhaps, in her desperation," added the Marquis, "when she finds that to-night's plot has so signally failed—a plot to the carrying out of which there can be no doubt she instigated my wretched nephew—she will adopt some extreme measure to take the very life of Madge Somers. Have I not now expressed the motives which influence you, when you say that you will see your mother and inform her that you are acquainted with the mystery of your birth?"

"Yes—those are the paramount motives," responded our hero. "But I am likewise desirous to relieve her mind from the terrible anxiety into which it must be plunged on account of this tremendous secret which she knows full well the woman Somers would sooner or later reveal. Moreover, you can full well comprehend, my dear Marquis, that it will be to me a source of satisfaction to tell my mother that I forgive her for all the past—to endeavour to move her to at least some little display of parental affection——"

But here Deveril suddenly stopped short and became pale as death; for the remembrance flashed to his mind, accompanied by a sickening sensation, that his own mother had at one time made to him overtures of love—a love which, had he yielded to the temptation, would have been horrible to think of!

"Let not that circumstance trouble you, my young friend," said the Marquis, in a kind and soothing manner—for he full easily penetrated what was passing in William's mind. "No—let it not trouble you more than it has heretofore done: for your mother of course knew not at the time that you were her own son——Indeed, there is no reason to believe that she knows it now; inasmuch as her measures have been taken to prevent Madge Somers from revealing to any one the secret which she—your mother—deems and hopes to be *still* a secret locked up in that woman's heart. But we must hasten back to the other room, where our prolonged absence has doubtless already created much astonishment—perhaps uneasiness."

"And your lordship," said Deveril, "will suffer those two men to depart? You will not, by invoking the aid of the law, create an inevitable exposure of all that has occurred——"

"I will suffer them to depart," answered Lord Eagledean. "Think you, William, that I would do aught inimical to your wishes? No—not for worlds!"

"And you will likewise, my generous friend," said our hero, "keep the secret——"

"From everybody!" responded the Marquis emphatically. "Yes—I will do so, because there is in my mind the deeply-seated conviction that heaven itself, in spite of your own noble forbearance, will sooner or later bring all these mysterious transactions to light; and I shall yet have to welcome you as Lord Saxondale in the presence of the world."

William shook his head slowly and solemnly, in deprecation of this prophecy; and he followed the Marquis from the room. On re-entering the opposite apartment, all eyes were at once turned upon them both: but Lord Eagledean hastened to observe that it was only in connexion with the critical position of the invalid woman they had been summoned forth by Angela,—adding that the poor creature was much better and past all danger.

"I have now to decide," he went on to observe, "upon the measures which are to be adopted in respect to you two,"—fixing his eyes upon the prisoners. "First, in regard to you," he said, now addressing himself specially to Spider Bill: "you are at liberty to depart hence. Should you encounter your accomplice who ere now saved himself by a precipitous flight—or that traitorous gardener who has been playing the part of a vile spy—you may tell them both, that for certain reasons a merciful course has been resolved upon, and that they have nothing to fear—but that it will be well for them to forbear from lightly mentioning the name of Lord Harold Staunton, their employer in the misdeed. Go—begone!"

The reader need scarcely be informed that Spider Bill lost not a moment in availing himself of the permission thus accorded; and muttering a few words of thanks, he precipitately left the house.

"With regard to you, infamous villain that you are—most unscrupulous, daring, and iniquitous of evil-doers," continued the Marquis, now addressing himself to the Cannibal, "if you had your merits, the transition would be from this apartment to a cell in Newgate. But mercy shall again be extended towards you—yet under certain conditions which I will explain in as few words as possible. I happen to have the means of ensuring your safe exit out of the country. Within the hour that is passing, a post-chaise will be ordered, and two of my companions here will take you with them to Dover—whence you will at once be embarked for France. There at least you will be in safety; and if you choose to seek Havre-de-Grace, you may embark thence for America, where you will find the remittance which some time back I made to New York on your account. Christoval, one word with you!"

The Marquis drew Don Diego into a corner of the room, and said to him in a whispering voice—"You must accompany this man to Dover. Lord Everton shall likewise go with you. Through the assistance of the Marshalls and of Edward Russell, his safe passage to the Continent can doubtless be ensured. Let measures be taken to the effect that not one farthing of money shall the wretch receive until he sets foot on the French coast. Deveril will lend him a cloak, and whatsoever other articles of apparel may help to render him a more decent object than he now is; and Frank shall issue forth at once and order a post-chaise."

The arrangements thus suggested by the Marquis, were duly carried out; and Chiffin the Cannibal took his departure in the custody—for such it really was—of Don Diego Christoval and Adolphus. We may as well observe here, that the entire plan, as laid down in respect to Chiffin, was executed; and through the agency of Ned Russell, he was safely landed at Calais. But whether he eventually got so far as the United States will be seen ere this narrative, which now draws towards a conclusion, is brought to a complete close.

Don Diego Christoval and Lord Everton having taken their departure with Chiffin the Cannibal, the Marquis of Eagledean and Francis Paton stayed at the villa to pass the night—or rather the remainder of it: for it was close upon one o'clock in the morning ere the inmates of that dwelling could think of retiring to rest. But even then, Angela Deveril would not seek her own couch. The servants had been too much alarmed and excited by the incidents of the night to render it prudent to allow either of them to sit up and attend upon Madge Somers. It should be observed that the nurse who was at first engaged to watch the invalid had within the last few days been herself very ill, and had returned to her own residence, which was at a little distance: but Angela having entertained the hope that the woman would return shortly and resume her duties, had not considered it necessary to put another in her place. Thus the absence of the nurse—which was duly reported by the old gardener—had been deemed by the conspirators one of the favourable circumstances for the execution of their plot at that particular time. Now, however, Angela missed the nurse much; for she herself was exhausted by the mental and physical excitement she had undergone: yet neither the fortitude nor the generous spirit of the young lady failed; and believing herself better capable than the servants of keeping the requisite vigil by the couch of Madge Somers, she resolved to adopt this course. It had been with considerable reluctance that William Deveril consented to her thus wearying herself by sitting up with the invalid; and he only desisted from remonstrance on receiving the assurance that another nurse should be procured early in the morning, in case the one who was formerly engaged, continued too much indisposed to resume her duties.

But our hero, the Marquis of Eagledean, and Francis Paton had not been many minutes in their respective chambers, when Angela called forth to them, in an affrighted voice, from the invalid's room; and they quickly hurried thither. A terrible change had suddenly taken place in Madge Somers: it was evident that she was dying. Francis sped off to fetch the medical attendant: one of the female domestics was summoned to assist Angela in doing all that possibly could be done for the unfortunate woman in the extremity to which she was brought: but human succour was unavailing—consciousness had abandoned her—the glaze of death came over her eyes—the ominous rattle in the throat commenced—and a few minutes after the return of Francis Paton with the medical man, she breathed her last.

Thus did she perish. Not another syllable beyond the few explanations already recorded, fell from her lips; and the circumstances so nearly and intimately relating to William Deveril's earliest years of existence, were left still involved in a mystery which seemed to be impenetrable.

CHAPTER CLXIII.

MOTHER AND SON.

Lady Saxondale knew that the scheme for the carrying-off of Madge Somers was to be put into execution on the particular night the incidents of which we have been describing: she also knew that Lord Harold Staunton purposed to accompany Chiffin the Cannibal in the hired van, in order to bear away the woman to some distant spot, where she might be disposed of in a manner that would silence her for ever. Her ladyship did not therefore expect any communication from Lord Harold during that night—nor perhaps for a day or two, until all should be over in respect to Madge Somers. His silence and his non-appearance would be to her a sufficient indication that the plot had thoroughly succeeded, and that the woman who was so much dreaded by her need no longer be regarded as an object of terror. Therefore her ladyship had gone to rest at her usual hour,—having seen Edmund reel off to his own room in a state of complete intoxication.

But Lady Saxondale had not been half-an-hour in her own chamber, and her night toilet was scarcely completed,—indeed, her maid was still combing out the masses of that luxuriant raven hair which neither time nor the influence of strong passions and the powerful workings of her mind had streaked with a single thread of silver,—when a loud knock and ring resounded through the dwelling. Her ladyship started up with dismay—for it instantaneously struck her that the plot had failed; and then there was a perfect gush of horrifying apprehensions through her tortured brain. But quickly recovering her presence of mind, when she saw that the maid was gazing upon her in a perfect consternation, she bade her hasten down stairs and see who the visitor might be. We should observe that this maid was not Lucilla, the one who had been so frightened by the incursion of Chiffin and Lord Harold Staunton into the room which she had appropriated to herself at Saxondale Castle during the absence of her mistress: for her ladyship had left Lucilla behind in Lincolnshire, inasmuch as she had foreseen that on returning to London she would have to receive visits from Lord Harold, and she of course did not wish the young nobleman to stand the chance of encountering that maid in whose presence he could not do otherwise than look particularly foolish.

When left alone in her dressing-room, while her dependant hastened down to ascertain who had knocked and rung in so peremptory a manner, Lady Saxondale said to herself, "Some new crisis is now at hand!"—and as she glanced at the mirror opposite to which she was standing, she saw that her countenance was of a dead pallor. Then, clasping her hands in a paroxysm of mental anguish, she bitterly, bitterly repented having ever entered upon a career of crime:—in that dread moment she would have given worlds to recall the past! But she was not a woman to remain long thus overpowered by her terrors: she felt the

necessity of exerting all her strength of mind to meet whatsoever danger might now be menacing her, and to encounter with fortitude whatsoever new emergency might have arisen. Feeling convinced that the visitor must be either Lord Harold, or else some messenger from him, she threw on a morning wrapper; and scarcely had she done this, when the maid returned to the room with the expected intimation. For it was as she had foreseen:—Lord Harold Staunton craved an immediate audience of her ladyship on most particular business.

"You need not wait up for me," said Lady Saxondale to the maid: and having given this injunction, she descended to the parlour into which the footman who answered the front door, had conducted Lord Harold.

The moment her ladyship entered, she perceived by the young nobleman's countenance that the plot had failed: for he was very much excited and had a bewildered look.

"You have not succeeded, Harold?" said her ladyship, in a quick trembling voice.

"No: everything has miscarried — and yet I know not how," he replied, as he threw himself upon a sofa, much exhausted; for he had run all the way from the Regent's Park to Saxondale House.

"You know not how?" ejaculated her ladyship. "But what are the circumstances? Tell me all you do know! leave me not in suspense!"

"Everything was carried out in the manner previously settled, up to a certain point. The vehicle was in readiness—the fellows entered the house — they remained there for two or three minutes—I thought it was all right—when all of a sudden the bed-room window was flung open, and out sprang one of them—a gentleman, whom I could not recognise, making a clutch at him as he thus precipitated himself from the casement."

"But the man——was he captured? was he killed? or did he escape, and tell you what had happened?"—and as Lady Saxondale put these questions in a hurried tone, her countenance exhibited all the tortures of suspense.

"He told me nothing: he sped wildly away," answered Harold; "and I, seeing that all was lost, took my own departure from the spot."

"And the other men—what became of them?"

"I cannot tell. One thing is certain, it was not Chiffin who thus made his escape. I fear therefore that he and the other agent whom we employed, were made prisoners."

"Good heavens! what is to be done?" ejaculated Lady Saxondale. "If those men have been taken captive — perhaps by the police lying in wait—they will reveal everything! they will say that they were engaged by you——"

But all in a moment Lady Saxondale experienced a relief, arising from the selfish reflection which suddenly struck her, that her name could not possibly have been mentioned in the business. At least Harold had all along promised that this secrecy should be observed, and had assured her that he had faithfully kept his pledge.

"*You*, at all events, have nothing to fear," he hastened to say, "so far as the night's work is concerned. Of course you know best how far and in what way the woman Madge Somers can compromise you, should she recover the faculty of speech——But I—what am I to do? I dare not return to my lodging—those fellows know where I lived—and if they confess who was their employer——"

"True!" observed Lady Saxondale; "it will be serious for you. You had better leave London at once——"

"To-night I can do nothing," answered Harold, with a sort of dogged determination. "I am tired to death, and unfit for any energetic proceeding. Besides, Harriet, I am not going to separate again from you. Our destinies are linked——"

"But I cannot harbour you here, Harold!" interrupted her ladyship. "It is impossible! The servants will know it——Edmund will know it——"

"They already more than suspect that you and I are not very great strangers to each other," interrupted Harold. "You would not have me go wandering forth to-night. Look at this costume—this glazed hat—this great rough coat. Do I not seem like a ruffian? how can I present myself at any hotel to ask for a bed? I may be arrested in the streets: who knows what hue and cry may be already raised after me?"

There was a mingling of entreaty and dogged determination in Staunton's looks and accents, as he thus spoke in a hurried manner. Lady Saxondale saw that it would be dangerous to provoke a quarrel with him; and she herself was getting so desperately reckless as to her own reputation, that she came to the conclusion it would be better to let him have his own way.

"Well," she accordingly said, "I must secrete you in the house as cautiously as I can. Fortunately I have dismissed my maid for the night. To-morrow we shall doubtless learn from some source or another the extent of the exposure which has taken place, and of the peril which menaces you. Then our measures can be taken. Perhaps the vortex of ruin——But no matter! it is too late to retrograde a single step. Come!"

They issued forth together from the parlour; and Lady Saxondale, opening and closing the front door, said in a loud voice, "Good night, Lord Harold!" which words were uttered in order to deceive any of the domestics who might possibly be listening to what was going on.

Staunton did not however leave the house: but with the utmost caution he followed Lady Saxondale up to her own chamber; and in the embraces of illicit passion they both forgot for a while the perils which, jointly or separately, they might have to apprehend. In the morning her ladyship told her maid, when the latter knocked at the door, that she could dispense with her services for the occasion; and thus Lord Harold's presence there remained unsuspected. His pea-coat and glazed hat were carefully locked up in a cupboard; and Lady Saxondale, watching an opportunity when no one was upon the stairs, conducted him down to the breakfast-parlour—so that when a servant entered, it might appear as if he had just arrived to pay this early visit. She was compelled to leave to chance any suspicions which might be entertained as to the real truth of the proceeding—and any inquiries which the footman might put to the hall-porter as to whether the young nobleman had indeed come that morning, or whether he had been several hours concealed beneath that roof.

Edmund remained in bed until a late hour; and it was not until Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold had finished their breakfast, that he made his appearance in the parlour. He was glad to see the young nobleman: he wanted society—and the presence of Staunton there seemed to promise a renewal of their former intimacy. He could not however prevent himself from smiling significantly at her ladyship—as much as to intimate that he understood very well upon what terms she was with Staunton: but the depraved and unprincipled young man—so deeply criminal too—was inspired by no loathing nor disgust at the thought of sitting down to table with his mother's paramour: for that she was really his mother, he of course believed, though the reader is now aware of the contrary.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, that a footman entered the parlour where they were all three seated, and informed Lady Saxondale that Mr. Deveril requested an immediate audience.

"Let him be shown to the drawing-room," replied her ladyship, without losing her self-possession: but she glanced significantly at Lord Harold, as much as to say that now the worst was likely to be known.

"Ah, William Deveril!" ejaculated Edmund, as the footman retired. "I wonder at his impudence in coming to the house——"

"Trouble yourself not with him or his concerns," said Lady Saxondale in a severe tone: and as she had regained all her empire over the ill-conditioned mind of the guilty young man, he at once held his peace.

Lord Harold followed her ladyship out into the hall—and said in a low, hurried, anxious whisper, "What do you think of Deveril's presence here?"

"I know not," she responded, her own eyes glittering with uneasiness: "but still I hope that no public exposure of last night's proceedings has taken place. If so, William Deveril would scarcely call upon me. His presence here seems indicative of a desire to save that exposure: but it is evident my name has been disagreeably mixed up in the transaction. Remain you quiet until I rejoin you."

Lord Harold returned into the parlour—while Lady Saxondale ascended to the drawing-room. She was filled with a nervous anxiety, which not all the natural strength of her mind could repress. She had not told Lord Harold the full extent of what she apprehended from Deveril's visit: her guilty soul was smitten with the horrible thought that Madge Somers had possibly revealed her secret: but if so, the reader may still understand that she was utterly unaware that William Deveril was her own son.

She proceeded to the drawing-room, assuming as well as she was able that dignified hauteur and calm stateliness of demeanour which she was wont to wear, and beneath which she was so often enabled to conceal the agitation of her soul. The moment she opened the door, she perceived Deveril standing near a window, and with his back towards her. Not that our young hero was gazing forth upon any particular object: he was looking on vacancy: for all his powers of vision were, so to speak, turned inwardly, to the contemplation of the varied emotions and thoughts that were excited in his breast. He was about to stand once more in the presence of her who had been a bitter and a remorseless enemy to him—but whom he now knew to be the authoress of his being! No marvel, then, if his soul were thus agitated: he felt that the interview about to take place was one of no ordinary character. He did not hear the door open, so absorbed was he in his meditations; and it was not until the sounds of footsteps close behind him fell upon his ear, that he turned abruptly—thus finding himself face to face with Lady Saxondale.

His countenance was exceeding pale, but inscrutable in its expression—though the dark eyes of her ladyship were instantaneously bent keenly and piercingly upon him, in order to ascertain, if possible, whether he came with an intent of resolute hostility, or whether his visit might be otherwise construed. He could not immediately speak: he knew not how to commence the explanations he had to give. At one moment he felt inclined to fling himself into the arms of Lady Saxondale, claiming her as his parent: but the next instant the harrowing reflection swept through his brain that it was possible she might repudiate him—she might disown him—she might refuse to acknowledge that claim, which he had to assert. On her side, she was equally at a loss how to address him,—not knowing what his object might be, or to what extent she was once more in his power. Thus did they stand for nearly a minute, gazing upon each other in silence—a silence that was painful enough for William Deveril, and full of suspense for Lady Saxondale.

At length William Deveril felt so completely overpowered by the emotions which were working so strongly within, though their outward expression was comparatively so slight,—that he was compelled to take a seat. Indeed, it was with an air of utter mental and physical exhaustion that he sank down upon a chair. Then Lady Saxondale perceived that he was under the influence of feelings which could not be altogether of a vindictive or hostile character; and she took courage: for wherever she saw an opportunity of playing upon the sensibilities of individuals, she knew that a strong weapon was in her own hand, and that her powers of consummate dissimulation and hypocrisy would enable her to derive immense advantages from the weakness of those with whom she had to deal. She did not break the silence which prevailed: but she also took a seat—and appeared to be patiently awaiting whatsoever explanation was about to be given; while in reality she was suffering her visitor to abandon himself more and more to the influence of the sentiments which had possession of him.

"I know not how to address you," he at length said, in a voice which was tremulous and half-suffocated with his emotions. "Bear with me a few minutes! think not my conduct intentionally rude, however strange it may appear."

"Take your own time, Mr. Deveril," said Lady Saxondale, forcing herself to assume even a degree of affability. "I am well pleased that you thus seem enabled to throw aside old rancours and animosities——"

"Rancours and animosities!" echoed Deveril, with almost a wild start, as a thousand reminiscences of the past swept through his mind. "Would to heaven that they had never existed!—

LADY BESS.
G.E.C WALL.

should be the fullest exposure of the tremendous cheat which she had palmed upon society: but in an instant it occurred to her that if her salvation were possible, it could only be by means of a hypocritical cajolery, and therefore was it that she strained her son to her bosom. The discourse which ensued was rapid; and each successive sentence spoken by our hero, was full of hope and encouragement for that vile bad woman. She learnt that Madge Somers was dead, and that she had revealed nothing beyond the bare fact of the fraud itself in respect to her own son who passed as Edmund Saxondale, but who was really the supplanter of him who was known to the world as William Deveril. Moreover, her ladyship received the welcome intelligence that the stupendous secret was to be kept—that nothing was to be made known—that the lips of Angela and the Marquis of Eagledean were sealed—and that William himself preferred his comparative obscurity, to the attainment of rank and riches by the ruin of his mother. It was not therefore difficult for Lady Saxondale to bring herself to lavish caresses upon our hero—to press him to her bosom—to acknowledge him as her offspring—to welcome him as her son—to speak kindly and to look tenderly.

But her heart was in reality unmoved towards him: those maternal yearnings which are so natural on the part of woman, and almost so invariable, were in this instance stifled, subdued, and crushed beneath the weight of selfish considerations. Had he proclaimed an intention of demanding his rights and appealing to the tribunals, she would have ignored him as her son—she would have repudiated his claim to be considered her offspring—she would have dared him to the proof; and she would have risked everything in the desperate struggle of one last fight for the maintenance of all that she had committed so many crimes to consolidate. But he had acted otherwise—her conduct was shaped accordingly—and when he went forth from her presence, she felt herself in reality more safe and secure than for many months past she had been. No wonder therefore that a smile of satisfaction and exulting triumph appeared upon her features: for in this brief interview she had comprehended all that was grand, noble, and magnanimous on the part of her son; and she felt confident that whatsoever he had promised he would faithfully perform.

The glance which she threw over her present position was in every way reassuring and comforting for the bad heart of this unscrupulous lady. Madge Somers was dead; and she need trouble herself concerning that woman no longer. Lord Harold Staunton, being irreconcilably at variance with his uncle the Marquis of Eagledean, was altogether dependent upon her—and therefore in her power. She needed not his services to forward her aims; and she could consequently dictate to him her own terms. In this respect her resolution was taken: she would retain him as her paramour: for having become excluded from the society in which she was once wont to move, she did not intend to stand upon any scruples in the gratification of her passions. Over Edmund her dominion was likewise completely established: the crime which he had committed and the vices to which he was addicted, rendered him pliant and ductile in her hands. She had no farther fear of the Marquis of Eagledean's animosity on account of past occurrences: her son would prove her friend in that quarter. As to Dr. Ferney, she flattered herself that a little cajolery or the simulation of intensest anguish, would at any time over-ride his scruples and prove more potent than his qualms of conscience. Thus altogether, as she contemplated her present position, Lady Saxondale felt satisfied, elate, and triumphant.

CHAPTER CLXIV

THE COUNT AND COUNTESS OF TOLEDO.

UPWARDS of eight months had elapsed from the date of those incidents which we have been relating; and it was now the autumn of 1845. A glorious autumn it was too—but nowhere more glowing nor richer in nature's produce of fruits and flowers than in the southern districts of France.

In the neighbourhood of a beautiful little village, on the French side of the Eastern Pyrenees, a delightful cottage-residence was situated in the midst of a spacious and well-kept garden. There were likewise pleasure-grounds and shrubberies—an orchard—and a piece of water, on which the swans floated in graceful stateliness. In the stables attached to this dwelling, there were three or four horses; and in the coach-house a close carriage and an elegant phaeton. The occupants of this charming villa were a gentleman and lady, two male domestics, and two females. The house and premises had been to let for some time until within about a couple of months of the period of which we are now writing—when they were suddenly taken by the Count and Countess of Toledo, the gentleman and lady already alluded to. They arrived one evening with a couple of attendants—one male and one female—in a post-chaise from a northernly direction—it was believed from Paris; and they halted for a day or two at the village inn. During their walks in the neighbourhood, they perceived the villa-residence so charmingly situated in the midst of its grounds; and taking a fancy to the spot, they decided upon settling there, at least for a while. The house was to be let furnished, and belonged to the old notary of the village: a bargain was soon struck—the Count de Toledo needed to give no references, for he had something much better in the shape of a well-filled purse; and hiring the house and premises for a year certain, he paid the entire rent in advance.

It was under auspices which thus seemed particularly favourable in the eyes of the villagers, that the Count and Countess took possession of the cottage. Their domestic establishment was increased by the hire of two more servants—one male and the other female—from the village: and at some adjacent town the Count purchased the horses and carriages. They lived in good style—paid their bills regularly—and were therefore well spoken of throughout the neighbourhood. They were speedily visited by the few good families resident in that district, and thus seemed to have just as much society as could be wanted by persons for whom a somewhat retired and secluded mode of life evidently possessed the greatest charm.

The Count de Toledo was, as his title implies, a

Spaniard; and his age appeared to be about seven or eight-and-twenty. He was a fine man—but of features too coarse to be styled actually handsome; and there was a certain roughness in his manner as well as in his appearance, which, though neither positively rude nor uncouth, yet showed a deficiency of that polish which is to be acquired in the drawing-rooms of the fashionable world. But it was understood that he had served in the Spanish army, and for several years had passed his time in camps or barracks, during the civil wars between the Christinos and the Carlists. It was therefore supposed that this partial roughness of manner which characterised him, had been derived from his military life; and as his conversation was interesting, varied, and full of anecdotes,—moreover, as he was proficient in all manly sports, was exceedingly hospitable in his entertainment of the few friends who visited at the cottage, and was liberal in his dealings with the village tradesmen—living also in good style, though in that comparative seclusion,—he soon became a favourite with all who knew him. His person, if not handsome, was of a fine manly appearance: his dark hair, singularly luxuriant, curled naturally: his large black eyes were full of fire; and he had a magnificent set of teeth. His form was well set, muscular, and athletic,—powerful without being ungainly. He was a superb horseman, and managed his spirited steed with the utmost skill and expertness. But it was said that he was vain and conceited, inasmuch as he studied a certain affectation in his dress, as if he were fond of the display of a varied and extensive wardrobe,—some of his garments being of those *outré* fashions which at that time had begun to be prevalent in the French capital.

The Countess de Toledo was an English lady, and remarkably handsome. Indeed, not to make any unnecessary mystery upon this point, we may as well at once state that she was an old acquaintance of the reader's—being none other than Juliana, Lady Saxondale's elder daughter. After her adventures with the Viscount de Chateauneuf, she had precipitately left the Durands' villa, in the manner described in an earlier chapter; and retiring to some remote and obscure French town, had there lived in seclusion, as well as under a feigned name, until the time arrived when she was to become a mother. The child perished at its birth; and when perfectly convalescent, Juliana returned to Paris. She had previously ascertained that her sister and the Marquis of Villebelle, neither of whom she had any inclination to meet, were then dwelling in Naples; and she had also learnt that the Viscount and Viscountess de Chateauneuf were absent on some tour whence they were not expected to return for several months. She was therefore under no apprehension of encountering in the capital any persons whom she would rather not meet: and taking handsome apartments, she looked about her for the purpose of entrapping either a wealthy husband or a paramour.

Juliana had determined not to revisit England. She had not a sufficiency of brazen effrontery to hold her head erect and look the world in the face where her shame was well known,—as her mother had done. With Lady Saxondale she had occasionally corresponded;—that very letter which she received when the reader was first introduced to her at the Durands' villa, was from her ladyship; and it made her acquainted with the omnipotent sway which Edmund's wife had obtained over him, as well as of the mother's determination to consign him to a madhouse. Subsequent correspondence from the same quarter informed Juliana of Adelaide's death in Lincolnshire: but the young lady did not suspect that it was a foul murder instead of an accident. In her own letters to her mother, she mentioned nothing of her amour with the Viscount de Chateauneuf: but she gave due notice of her several changes of abode—of the death of her child—and of her removal to Paris again. Lady Saxondale liked her daughter too little to be very pressing in her letters that she should return to England: on the contrary, she wrote her approval of Juliana's resolve to remain abroad, and was by no means niggard in remitting funds as often as they were asked for.

It was in Paris, on her return thither after her confinement, that Juliana fell in with the Count de Toledo, who was living in grand style at one of the most fashionable hotels. At first she considered him somewhat repulsive in his looks and uncouth in his manners: and no wonder, when she contrasted him with the delicate beauty of Francis Paton, and the exquisite gentility of the Viscount de Chateauneuf. But as their acquaintance improved, the first feelings of aversion rapidly wore off: the fine eyes and splendid teeth of the Count de Toledo were no inconsiderable saving-clauses in his favour: he was good-humoured and entertaining—liberal and frank-hearted; and Juliana saw that the conquest would be a much more easy one than that of a nobleman or gentleman of a greater drawing-room refinement. Besides, the Count in due course began to pay his addresses with an evidently honourable intention; and a marriage with a Spanish nobleman who seemed possessed of ample wealth, was a chance by no means to be discarded by a young lady in so false a position as Juliana Farefield.

When she perceived that the Count de Toledo was serious in his intentions towards her, she prudently instituted inquiries concerning him. She had in her service a French maid of exceeding shrewdness and quick intelligence; and through her she ascertained that the Count was really, as he had often informed her, a frequent visitor at the house of the Spanish Ambassador in Paris. This was sufficient to guarantee his respectability,—while his mode of life evidently indicated the possession of ample means. On her side, Juliana took good care to let the Spanish nobleman become aware that she was the daughter of Lady Saxondale, and the sister of the bearer of the same proud title: she devised a story of ill-health in England, and the advice of physicians, as the cause for her residing abroad; and she did not forget to mention that her younger sister was married to the Marquis of Villebelle, a Frenchman of high standing and at that time Minister Plenipotentiary at the Court of Naples.

Being thus mutually satisfied with each other, there was nothing to prevent a matrimonial alliance; and as the Count de Toledo was a rigid Catholic, the nuptials were solemnized in a twofold manner—first in a French Church, and immediately afterwards in the chapel of the English Embas-

it had been arranged that after the ceremonies, the Count was to bear his bride into Spain—where they were to take up their abode on his ancestral estates in the Principality of Catalonia. They quitted Paris in a post-chaise,—the Countess attended by her maid—the Count by a valet who had been a considerable time in his service. But during the journey southward, they saw in the newspapers that there had been one of those sudden changes of Ministry which were of such frequent occurrence in Spain; and the Count was overwhelmed with affliction. It was some time before Juliana could obtain from him the revelation of the cause of that sorrow which had thus so abruptly seized upon him. At length however, by dint of caresses and entreaties, she gleaned the following explanations:—

He had originally been an officer in the Queen's service; but as his sympathies were always in favour of Don Carlos, he had passed over with a considerable portion of his regiment to that Prince's side. For this action he had been excluded from the amnesty which took place at the termination of the civil war: but he was given to understand, after a little while, that he might in all safety return to his estates, which had not been confiscated. This circumstance of the non-confiscation of his property—together with the secret intelligence forwarded to him that he might go back to his ancestral mansion—was to be ascribed to the fact that he possessed a staunch friend in one of the Ministers then in power,—though this friendship had been unavailingly exercised towards obtaining the inclusion of the Count's name in the amnesty. The Count did return to his estates, where for some period he lived unmolested: he then went to Paris, and fell in with Juliana, whom he married. Several successive Ministries had in the meantime held the reins of power; and no measure was adopted towards his own personal molestation or the seizure of his domains: he had therefore considered himself perfectly secure, and altogether justified in espousing her who had captivated his heart. But now this sudden overthrow of the last Ministry had brought into office his most implacable enemy, at whose hands everything was to be dreaded; and hence the grief with which he was overwhelmed on reading the intelligence in the newspapers.

Such was the narrative of explanations which the Count de Toledo gave Juliana: and she was naturally much chagrined at a circumstance which threatened to render her husband a proscribed exile from his country. Besides, the Count had represented his Catalan mansion and his surrounding estates in such glowing colours, that the bride was naturally desirous to be introduced to the palatial residence and the wide domains of which she had become the mistress; and therefore her disappointment and her affliction were all the more bitter. But there was something consolatory in the statements which her husband, on calmer deliberation, was enabled to make. He fortunately had still a very considerable supply of ready money at his command: he knew also that the intendant of his domains had ample funds in hand, and was a strictly honourable man—so that it would only be needful to communicate with him, in order to obtain the prompt handing over of these immediately available resources. Juliana was thus enabled to take a fairer view of their prospects than at the first glance they seemed to present; and as the journey was continued southward, she deliberated with her husband upon the course to be adopted. He suggested that they should push on to the very verge of the Pyrenees, and that their honeymoon should be passed in some quiet retreat within the French frontier, whence they might not only watch the progress of affairs in Spain, but the Count might also communicate with his intendant in Catalonia. The proposition was agreeable to Juliana—who, if compelled to remain in France at all, much preferred a comparative seclusion, where there was all the less probability of her husband hearing anything to her disadvantage: for, as the reader may suppose, she had taken good care not to inform him that she had already been the mistress of two paramours, and had likewise been a mother. They reached the little village alluded to in the opening of this chapter: the picturesque cottage, with its attached grounds, at once appeared to them a suitable residence; and as the notary to whom it belonged, would not let it for a shorter term than a year, a man of the Count's resources was not likely to hesitate at the arrangement. On the contrary, as he expressed himself to Juliana, he would only be too glad to sacrifice some little rent by being enabled to return into Spain and bear his bride to his ancestral home at an earlier period than the term for which they hired the villa-residence.

The Countess of Toledo did not love her husband in the proper meaning of the term: her's was a heart totally unfitted for a pure and virtuous affection. Whatsoever feeling she experienced at all akin to love, was one of the sense and not of the sentiment. It was intertwined with the gross cravings of her temperament; and the attachment which she bore for the Count was precisely the same which in her licentiousness she would have bestowed upon a paramour. Her feeling for Francis Paton had been of the same character—but more furious and frenetic in its devouring regards, because *he* was the first by whom her sensuousness was gratified. The Viscount de Chateauneuf she had loved much less, because her designs in respect to him were based upon a worldly-minded selfishness; and when these were disappointed, she could as readily hate and detest as ever she had liked him. The Count de Toledo was the object of her sensuous regards: she was also the more pleased with him the better she knew him, on account of his good-nature and the manliness of his spirit, which qualities invariably secure the esteem of every kind and class of women. But on the other hand, he was much attached to her. It is certain that he had espoused her not with the idea that she possessed any pecuniary means of importance; because she had not deceived him on that point: nor indeed, when estimating their immediate resources, had he for a single instant taken into calculation or made the slightest allusion to any funds which she might in case of emergency obtain from her mother. But he liked her for herself alone. She was remarkably handsome;—since her confinement her charms had expanded into a richer exuberance than even that which they before possessed; and being a creature of luxurious temperament, she was well calculated to please the fervid Spaniard. There was some-

thing, too, in the polish of her manners and the easy elegance of her deportment, which might be supposed to exercise no ordinary influence upon the rougher nature of her husband. She spoke French fluently: this was the language in which they were accustomed to converse; and being intelligent as well as accomplished, Juliana could render her discourse sparkling, winning, or fascinating, according to her purpose or her humour. Moreover, the Count was proud of his handsome English wife; and a husband's pride of the object of his choice is in itself a degree of admiration which cannot be inseparable from love.

The first two months of their residence near the little French village was happy enough: for as we have before observed, they had just sufficient society to prevent the time from hanging heavily on their hands, and for preventing their mode of existence from appearing monotonous. Juliana rode well on horseback; and she liked to accompany her husband amidst the beautiful scenery of the neighbourhood where they dwelt. They drove out too in the phaeton;—and in their close carriage they visited occasionally of an evening the few families with whom they had become acquainted. Juliana had written to her mother to mention her marriage; and Lady Saxondale was but too glad to have thus got rid of a daughter whom for some time past she had ceased to love, but towards whom she had been compelled to act with a certain degree of apparent kindness, inasmuch as Juliana was acquainted with the secret of the tremendous imposture in respect to Edmund.

It was the month of September when we introduce our reader to the cottage where the Count and Countess of Toledo are now residing. Their somewhat extravagant mode of life—the purchase of horses and carriages—and the sumptuousness of the entertainments which they gave, and which though few, were nevertheless costly in the extreme,—had by this time absorbed the greater portion of the available funds which the Count had brought with him from Paris. One day, he mentioned to his wife that it would be needful to communicate with his intendant; and as no tidings had been received of any overt measure of a hostile character being adopted towards him, either in the form of proclaimed proscription or of property confiscation, he suggested that it would be as well if he were to pay a secret and stealthy visit to his estate in order to transact personally his business with his steward. Juliana was averse to this project, inasmuch as by the mere fact of her husband's proposing to repair with so much precaution to his domain, it was sufficiently evident he feared to be arrested. He however assured her that there was little danger of such a result, as he could rely upon the fidelity of his dependants—but that being liable to hostile proceedings, he of course purposed to adopt the precautions he had named. She herself offered to undertake the journey and see the intendant: but he observed that it would look strange in the village if she were thus to absent herself while he remained at home. Then she proposed that his valet should be entrusted with the mission: but the Count objected to place so strong a temptation as a considerable sum of money in the man's hands. Thus all her objections and her propositions were overruled; and the Count himself set off on the expedition.

He remained absent for about ten days, during which interval Juliana experienced more or less uneasiness on his behalf. At the expiration of this period he returned home safe, at a late hour one night, bringing with him a certain amount of money—but by no means so large as she had been led to expect. This however he readily accounted for, by stating that the intendant had been compelled to lay out considerable sums on the repairs of the mansion when he first received the intelligence that it was to be gotten in good order for the reception of a mistress. In respect to his own peculiar position in a political sense, it remained unaltered either for the better or the worse: but it was still dangerous for him to think of returning openly to Spain, so long as his enemy continued a member of the Ministry.

It was about this time that Juliana read in one of the French newspapers that the Marquis of Villebelle had been transferred from the Neapolitan Embassy to that of Madrid, thus receiving a promotion in the diplomatic hierarchy. It farther appeared that the Marquis and Marchioness, accompanied by their suite, were about to proceed by sea from Naples to Spain, so as to avoid the circuitous route of an overland journey. As the Count frequently assured Juliana that the present Spanish Ministry could not possibly last long,—and that as the next one would most probably consist of personages more friendly disposed towards himself, he might expect to be shortly enabled to return openly to his estates,—she began to reflect that as they might possibly visit Madrid, where she would encounter her sister and brother-in-law, it was bad policy on her part to abstain from corresponding with them. She therefore wrote to Constance, acquainting her with her marriage, and highly eulogising her husband. It happened that the Count was going into the village at the moment when Juliana had finished writing this letter; and he accordingly took it with him to put in the post. Days went by—they grew into weeks—and still no answer was returned. Nevertheless Juliana read in the newspapers that in the interval the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle had arrived in safety at Madrid, and were duly installed in the mansion of the French Embassy in that city. She fancied that her letter must have miscarried: for she thought that Constance was too generous-hearted to cherish any rancour on account of her precipitate flight from the Durands' villa after her affair with the Viscount de Chateauneuf. She accordingly wrote again; and the Count, taking charge of the letter, promised to see that the postmaster was particular in consigning it to the mail-bag. Again did days and weeks go past; and still no response came. Then Juliana could arrive at no other conclusion than that her sister was mortally offended with her; and her pride prevented her from penning a third epistle.

Christmas was now drawing near; and again were the Count's funds at a low ebb: again therefore did he resolve upon paying another stealthy visit to his estates in Catalonia on the other side of the Pyrenean boundary. On this second occasion he remained absent for a fortnight,—at the expiration of which time he returned safe and sound, and with a considerable sum of money Juliana was rejoiced at the thought that her hus-

band possessed such an honest intendant; and she more than ever longed to hasten and become the mistress of those estates which produced such ample revenues. It was on the morning after the Count de Toledo's return, that they rode out together in the phaeton. On these occasions they seldom took a domestic with them, as they preferred to be left to their own unrestrained discourse. After making a considerable circuit they were returning through the village,—when a sudden ejaculation, as if of surprised recognition, reached their ears. Glancing simultaneously in the direction whence it came, they perceived a wretched-looking man, wrapped in the rags of beggary—but such tatters as he did wear, indicating a denizen of the Catalan wilds on the other side of the Pyrenees.

"Ah!" cried the Count de Toledo, "I know the poor man! he is a labourer of my own estate—— Or rather, dearest Juliana," he added tenderly, "I ought to say of *our* estate:"—then having made a gesture to the wretched object, as if to imply that he would come to his succour, the Count gave the reins to his wife, requesting her to drive slowly on; and he leapt down from the vehicle.

This little incident occurred on the outskirt of the village, and was unnoticed by any of the inhabitants.

Juliana drove on in a leisurely manner, as she had been directed, and without thinking very much of the occurrence. In a few minutes she was rejoined by her husband,—who, taking the reins from her hands, drove homeward. While proceeding thither he gave her to understand that the unfortunate labourer had wounded a soldier in a disturbance, and had been compelled to fly the country,—adding that as he (the Count) happened to have but a mere trifle of money about him at the time, he had bidden the poor man await him in the village, whither he purposed to return and give him more substantial assistance. Accordingly, on reaching the house, the Count went to the strong-box; and having taken thence what he wanted, hastened back to the village.

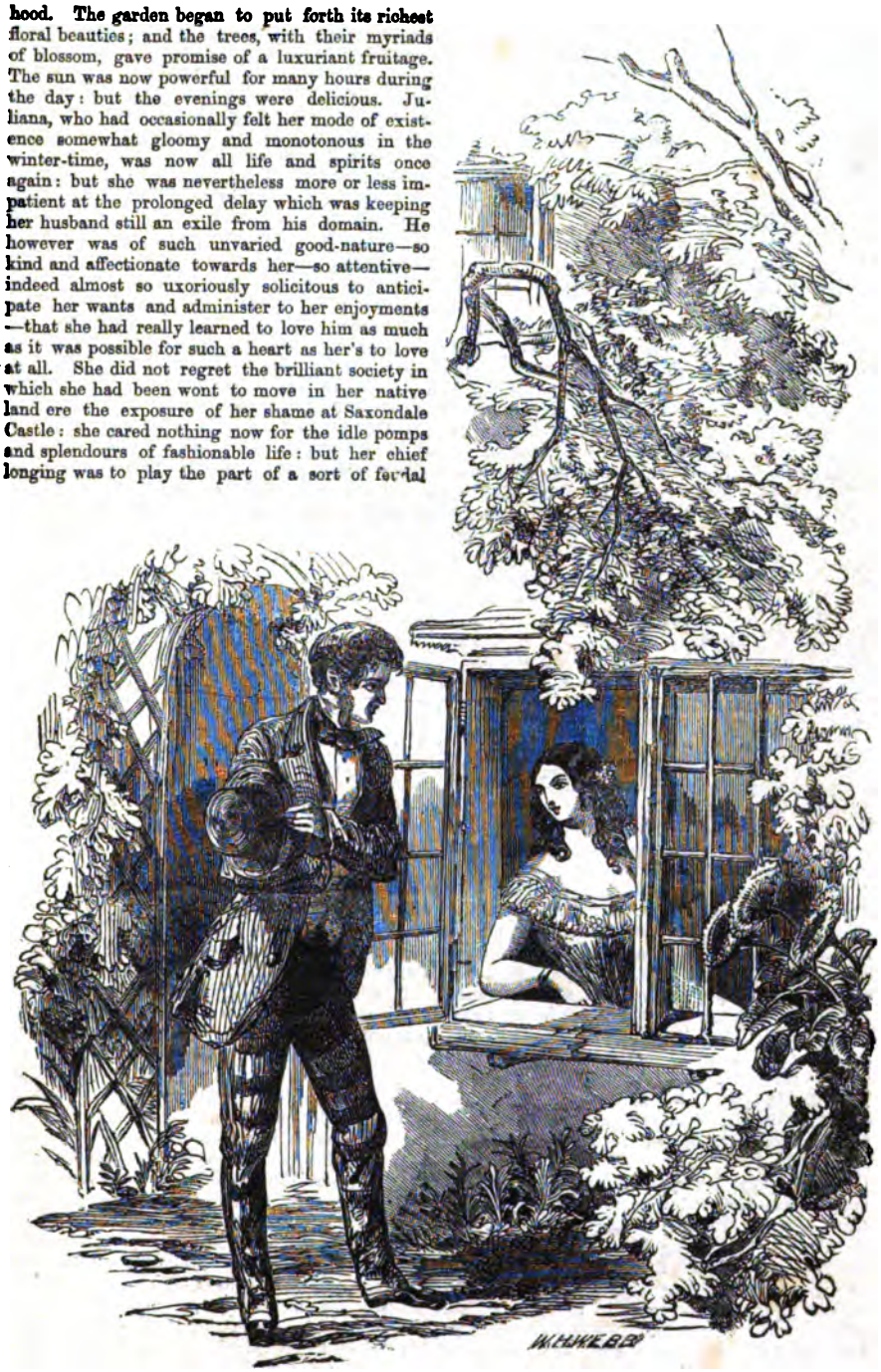
A month passed after this incident; and one day, on a tradesman presenting the amount of his bill, the Count de Toledo bade him return in a fortnight, at which time he would be in receipt of ample funds. The man was perfectly satisfied with the assurance, and went away. But Juliana was astonished that her husband should have thus put him off, as she imagined that there must be a considerable remnant of the large sum which he had brought back on his second visit to his Spanish domain. The Count assured her that somehow or another the money had melted away,—adding with a laugh, that he must make another journey across the Pyrenean boundary. As he treated the matter thus lightly, the Countess thought but little more of it—save and except so far as it regarded the necessity for this third separation. The Count however assured her that he incurred little or no risk; and after affectionately embracing her, he mounted his horse and took his departure.

In the evening of that very same day, Juliana was informed by her maid that a person was inquiring for the Count, and would not be satisfied with the assurance of his lordship's absence unless he saw the Countess herself. She, fancying that it might be some particular business which had brought the individual thither, desired that he should be shown into the room where she was seated: but the moment he made his appearance, she at once recognised him as that same wretched-looking object who had been relieved a month back. He was not however now clad in the same ragged style, but was very decently apparelled in a suit of broad-cloth, which but ill became his uncouth and ungainly form. He had a dissipated look; and his aspect altogether was little prepossessing. He addressed the Countess in his native Spanish tongue, of which she understood too little to comprehend him: she accordingly desired that her husband's valet, who was a Spaniard, should be sent for; and the moment the domestic entered the room, a mutual recognition took place between him and the visitor. This was of course natural enough, inasmuch as the latter had been represented as a labourer on the Count's estate, and therefore could scarcely fail of being known to the valet, who had been for some years in his lordship's service. The valet drew the man away from the room; and leading him into the garden, conversed with him there for a considerable time—at the expiration of which he took his departure. Returning to the parlour, the valet informed the Countess that the poor man, relying on his lordship's generosity, had called to solicit some farther assistance, which he (the valet) had given to the extent of his means.

A fortnight elapsed from the date of the Count's departure on this third visit to his estates; and he then re-appeared at the cottage: but his left arm was in a sling—he looked pale, ill, and haggard. Juliana was at first much terrified on his account: but he hastened to assure her that though he had sustained a somewhat serious injury, there was nothing to be profoundly alarmed at. A surgeon was at once sent for; and he substituted proper appliances for the clumsy bandages which had in the first instance been tied over the wound. Meantime the Countess had gathered from her husband's lips that he had been attacked by banditti on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees—that he had defended himself successfully against them, until some shepherds who were guarding their flocks, happened to come to his assistance, when the ruffians retreated precipitately. He had however sustained that injury in the arm: but he treated it lightly, inasmuch as he had frustrated the object of the predatory horde, and retained in safety the considerable sum of money which he had brought with him from his intendant. Juliana now told him of the visit which the labourer had paid during his absence—at which the Count at first appeared considerably annoyed: but when he learnt that the Countess was unable to comprehend him, and had transferred him over to the valet for explanations, his lordship became appeased,—treating the matter more lightly, and passing away from the subject with the observation "that the fellow deserved some blame for imposing upon good-nature."

Several weeks passed: the Count's wound was thoroughly healed—he no longer felt any bad effects from it; and as the Spring, which is early in its visits in that genial clime, was now at hand, the rides and drives were regularly resumed amidst the delightful scenery of the neighbour

hood. The garden began to put forth its richest floral beauties; and the trees, with their myriads of blossom, gave promise of a luxuriant fruitage. The sun was now powerful for many hours during the day: but the evenings were delicious. Juliana, who had occasionally felt her mode of existence somewhat gloomy and monotonous in the winter-time, was now all life and spirits once again: but she was nevertheless more or less impatient at the prolonged delay which was keeping her husband still an exile from his domain. He however was of such unvaried good-nature—so kind and affectionate towards her—so attentive—indeed almost so uxoriously solicitous to anticipate her wants and administer to her enjoyments—that she had really learned to love him as much as it was possible for such a heart as her's to love at all. She did not regret the brilliant society in which she had been wont to move in her native land ere the exposure of her shame at Saxondale Castle: she cared nothing now for the idle pomps and splendours of fashionable life: but her chief longing was to play the part of a sort of feudal



peeress at her husband's mansion in the midst of his wide domains. The Count, comprehending what thus at times was occupying her thoughts, assured her that the present Ministry could not possibly last much longer—that it had already endured for a greater period than could have been anticipated—and that its fall would no doubt prove in its results favourable to the wishes which they both so deeply entertained. Juliana made no reply to her husband's representations: in her heart she feared that he only held out these hopes in order to appease her, but in which he himself was by no means sanguine.

It was one beautiful afternoon at the end of March, that Juliana was seated by the open window of the cottage parlour, while her husband was smoking his cigar in the garden. At every turn he passed by the casement, and bent upon her a fond look, at the same time bestowing some kind word. Having finished his cigar, he approached the house for the purpose of entering—but again lingered in front of the window to make some passing remark. By one of those movements which have no particular meaning, he took off his hat as he stood near the casement; and so powerful was the glow of the sun that it made his hair, which was of a dark colour, seem absolutely light in the golden beams which poured their effulgence upon his head. Juliana was just on the point of admonishing him not to expose himself too much to the fervid heat of the unclouded sun,—when she noticed that he dropped his hat with a sudden start, and as if all in an instant thrown into some degree of excitement or confusion. But as quickly recovering his self-possession, he said to his wife, "I will rejoin you, dearest, in a few moments:"—and then hastened away towards the farther extremity of the garden.

Juliana thought there was something singular in this proceeding; and she at once issued from the cottage. On emerging into the garden, she beheld her husband entering the orchard, in company with a man whom she recognised as that labourer who on two previous occasions had sought relief. A gloom came over her countenance: she liked not the aspect of these circumstances; and from the shade of some trees, she watched her husband and that individual as they passed slowly along in the orchard. She saw them stop short, and both gesticulated violently; so that she now wondered that the man should have the impertinence to assume so threatening an attitude in the presence of the Count. A suspicion that there was something more in the repeated visits of this person than she had hitherto been led to believe, entered her mind; and this gave rise to other reflections, which were by no means calculated to relieve her from anxiety.

Still she kept her eyes fixed upon her husband and his companion; but as she suddenly beheld them separate—the man remaining where he was, and the Count retracing his way rapidly towards the dwelling—she sped back thither before he had an opportunity of seeing that she had issued forth at all. Resuming her seat in the parlour, she awaited the Count's entrance,—composing her features as well as she was able, and wondering whether he would tell her what had taken place. He entered the cottage in a few minutes; but instead of rejoining her in the parlour, went straight up to the bed-chamber where the cash-box was kept. She at once surmised that it was to procure fresh means of relief for the man who thus appeared to have such strong claims on her husband's bounty. He did not remain many moments upstairs; and on descending, just looked into the parlour to inform his wife that he would be with her in a few minutes. He then sallied forth again; and Juliana, haunted by suspicions which grew stronger and stronger, though they were still utterly vague and indefinite, hastened up to the bed-room. The Count, in his hurry, had forgotten to lock the strong-box, of which he was invariably accustomed to keep the key; and as Juliana happened at this time to know exactly what amount there ought to be in the casket, she was speedily enabled to estimate how much had just been taken thence. To her surprise and annoyance, as well as with a still strengthening suspicion, she discovered that a very formidable inroad indeed had been made upon their pecuniary resources, so that there was scarcely sufficient left to meet the tradesmen's bills that would be coming in at the end of the week. She descended again to the parlour,—sadly troubled, but still utterly at a loss to conceive how it was possible that a mere labourer on her husband's estate could have obtained such a hold on his lordship as thus to extort from him so large a pecuniary succour. She now felt assured that on the occasion when the contents of the cash-box had so mysteriously diminished, necessitating at the time a repetition of the Count's visit to his intendant,—the assistance he had afforded the poor man must have been to a far greater amount than he had represented, and that thereby the exhaustion of their funds was to be accounted for. All these things agitated, bewildered, and perplexed the mind of Juliana: but in the midst of her troubled reflections, the Count entered the room. He at once, with his wonted frankness, informed her that the man who was succoured on previous occasions, had called again to implore farther bounties.

"As you may easily suppose," his lordship went on to say, "I was little gratified by this renewal of his importunities: but as he solemnly assured me that he had now a chance of benefiting himself permanently, if he had only a sum of ready money, I agreed to help him for the last time."

"And to what amount did you thus assist him?" inquired Juliana, not suffering her husband to perceive that the incident had at all troubled her.

"I am afraid I have been rather foolish," responded the nobleman, with a good-natured laugh: "for I have given the fellow a sum sufficient to make a gentleman of him."

"But how is it possible," asked Juliana, still with a perfectly ingenuous air, "that a poor labouring man should need such ample supplies—and that you should consent thus to minister to his wanton extravagances?"

It struck Juliana that the Count eyed her strangely for a moment—with a keenness as if to penetrate into the depths of her soul, and ascertain whether she had any deeper motive than mere passing curiosity for putting these questions. She maintained her countenance perfectly: the reader knows she was a perfect mistress of dissimulation; and she did not choose to let her husband perceive that she had been smitten with any disagreeable

impression; for if so, he would at once suspect that she had watched his movements. Therefore, when he saw nothing in her features to betray what was passing in her mind, he suddenly desisted from that keenness of gaze,—and observed in his wonted off-hand frank way, "The fellow belongs to a family that has been long located on my domain. Since he has been in France, he has fallen, I fear, into bad company: but he is now repentant, and purposes to lead a steady life. So I have given him this last chance—and at all events have bade him come into my presence no more."

The discourse was then turned into another channel; and Juliana knew not what to think. She could not altogether banish the disagreeable impression made upon her mind, nor the vague suspicions that something was wrong, which had been excited in her bosom: but still her husband's explanations had been given with a frankness which seemed perfectly sincere; and so far as she could perceive, he had not practised any deception towards her. But a circumstance which she had foreseen now happened in the course of a day or two: this was that the Count informed her of his intention to undertake another journey across the Pyrenees.

"This time," she at once said, "you must permit me to accompany you? If there be dangers, I will share them."

"And it is for this very reason, dearest, that you must *not* accompany me," was his immediate response, accompanied by caressing manifestations of affection.

"I beseech you," persisted Juliana, "to let me go with you on the present occasion. Besides, I long to see the place which sooner or later will be our home. I have hitherto concealed, if not altogether subdued, my impatience——"

"And you must continue to do so for a short space longer," interrupted her husband. "You cannot accompany me now, my dearest wife: it would perhaps seriously compromise my safety. I expect to receive some tidings of a nature favourable to our hopes, and trust that in a very short time there will no longer be any necessity for stealthy visits to my ancestral home."

"Promise me, then—promise me faithfully," said Juliana, "that if circumstances should compel you to pay another stealthy visit, after this one, to your estates, you will suffer me to accompany you."

"I promise faithfully," responded her husband: and having embraced her, he once again took his departure on horseback—but unattended and alone.

CHAPTER CLXV.

THE MEETING.

For the first few days after they had thus separated, Juliana continued much troubled in her mind. Sometimes she was dull and desponding—haunted by vague suspicions—a prey to indefinite fears: at other times she was excited, impatient, and angry,—thinking that she had not acted with proper spirit in forbearing from questioning her husband farther relative to the man whose frequent extortions compelled him to visit his intendant oftener than he otherwise would have done. And now, too, she began to reflect that these repeated absences might have been very well avoided, if the intendant himself came periodically across the Pyrenean boundary to bring the requisite supplies,—which course, indeed, seemed much more natural on the part of that functionary, rather than suffer his master to endanger his own safety by running after him. She wondered that this had not struck her before. Suspicion is terribly prolific: it engenders a thousand;—and such was the case in the present instance. Juliana began to calculate that though they lived well, and even handsomely, yet their expenditure must be wretchedly insignificant in comparison with the lordly revenues produced by her husband's estates: that is to say, if they were of the magnitude which he had represented. The thought would steal into her head that in some way or another she had been deceived: but this was an idea too frightful to harbour willingly. She endeavoured to banish it altogether; but she could not. In her attempt to escape from it, she sought excitement in other ways. She paid a round of visits—she invited guests to the cottage—she rode out frequently—she took long walks. Still that idea haunted her. Yet, how could she have been deceived? Not in respect to her husband's rank and station: for had not her maid ascertained in Paris that he was all he had represented himself? But perhaps it was in the extent of his pecuniary resources that he had misled her: or perhaps his estates were really confiscated, and he had not liked to reveal the distressing truth—so that the resources which he represented as coming from his intendant, might be in reality furnished by the purse of private friendship? At all events she resolved to lead him into the fullest explanations on his return: for now that her suspicions were once excited, she could not possibly endure a state of uncertainty and suspense.

A week had elapsed from the date of the Count de Toledo's departure on this last occasion,—when one day, as Juliana was riding in the phaeton through the village, the groom driving her, she was struck with astonishment on beholding M. Durand standing at the door of the inn. She liked this encounter as little as possible; inasmuch as the Durands knew full well, when she was staying at their villa at Anteuil, that she was in a way to become a mother; and they were likewise perfectly cognizant of her amour with the Viscount de Chateauneuf. If a word were breathed in the village of those circumstances, her reputation would be ruined—the tale would inevitably reach her husband's ears—and she would be dishonoured in his eyes. M. Durand had at once recognised her, so that she was compelled to order the phaeton to stop. Hastily alighting, she ran forward as if to welcome him with enthusiasm—but in reality to prevent him from addressing her by the name of Madame Chesterfield (as she had been called at the villa) in the presence of the groom. She shook him by the hand; and inquired with much seeming friendship after his wife: M. Durand led her into a parlour in the hostelry; and there she found Madame Durand herself. It appeared that a brother of the old gentleman's had recently died at Barcelona; and as he had no children, M. Durand

was his heir. He had been established for a long series of years as a merchant in the Catalan capital, and had amassed a considerable fortune. On the strength of this rich heritage, Monsieur and Madame Durand were travelling post from Paris, and had diverged several miles from their more direct route, in order to pay a flying visit to some distant relations who dwelt in those parts. On their name being mentioned, Juliana discovered—much to her apprehension and annoyance—that they were one of the families whom she was accustomed to visit.

She now had to give explanations on her own side; and these were to a certain extent humiliating enough. She was obliged to confess that the name of Chesterfield was a feigned one—that the story of a husband in India was altogether an invention—that she had never been married at the time she was at the Durands' villa—and that she was in reality the daughter of an English peeress named Saxondale. She went on to inform the Durands that she was now married to the Count de Toledo, a Spanish nobleman who for political reasons was unable to enter Spain; and that for some time past they had resided in the neighbourhood of that village. She begged and implored Monsieur and Madame Durand to save her reputation; and as we have before stated that this worthy couple were by no means over nice in their notions of female morality, they readily promised to follow her injunctions. She lavished upon them all possible proofs of gratitude and friendship; and insisted that they should dine with her: but they had just partaken of luncheon at the hotel, and they were in haste to continue their journey. Indeed, their post-chaise was now in readiness; and they took their leave of the Countess de Toledo, to pursue their way,—their purpose being to enter Spain by way of Perpignan at the eastern extremity of the Pyrenees.

Juliana was much relieved when she saw them take their departure: but she now more than ever longed to quit France altogether, and fix her abode on her husband's domain; for she calculated that in the depths of Catalonia there was far less chance of incurring such disagreeable encounters as this one, than on the northern side of the Pyrenees. She therefore looked anxiously forward for the Count's return, not merely that she might have the fullest explanations with him on the various points which troubled her—but likewise because he had given her to understand he expected some favourable intelligence with regard to his own political position, on the occasion of this visit into Spain. Ten days more passed. The Count had been absent above a fortnight; and his prolonged absence rendered Juliana more and more uneasy and restless. But now another incident occurred which requires special mention.

It was late one evening—and just as Juliana was about to retire for the night—that the sounds of an equipage dashing rapidly along the main road, which skirted the front of the garden, reached her ears. There was in this nothing extraordinary, inasmuch as it was one of the routes from Perpignan to Paris; and therefore the passage of vehicles was by no means unfrequent. But scarcely had this equipage reached the border of the grounds attached to the cottage, when a tremendous crash was heard by all the inmates of the dwelling. They rushed forth: the horses were plunging—the postilions were shouting and swearing—and the vehicle itself, which was a handsome travelling-carriage, lay upset in the middle of the road. A valet and lady's-maid who had been riding in the rumble behind, were precipitated from their places: fortunately, however, they had fallen upon a bank of long grass by the road-side, and were therefore little hurt. But what was the astonishment—and for a moment what the dismay of Juliana—when, as she hurried forth from the cottage with her domestics, to render assistance, she recognised in that lady's-maid the faithful Mary-Anne, the dependant of her sister Constance.

It was a beautiful night; and the heavens were studded with stars. Scarcely therefore had Juliana reached the garden-gate, when she made this recognition, as the valet—a smart Frenchman—was supporting Mary-Anne in his arms, and questioning her in broken English, as well as with much anxiety of mind, whether she were hurt. A glance from the lady's-maid to the carriage, showed Juliana the form of the Marquis of Villebelle, who had just emerged from the upset vehicle, and was drawing Constance forth. Juliana hastened to make herself known to the Marquis; and the next moment she was clasped fondly and fervently in the arms of her sister Constance, who had escaped without the slightest injury from the accident. As infinite as was the joy, so great was evidently the astonishment likewise of Constance in thus encountering her sister; and a rapid interchange of observations made the Marquis and Marchioness aware, on the one hand, that Juliana was married to the Count de Toledo—and informed Juliana herself, on the other hand, that the letters she had written to her sister had never reached their destination.

One of the axletrees of the carriage was broken; and though it might be sufficiently repaired with a cord and a bar of wood, to enable the horses to drag it into the village, the vehicle was totally unfit for the reception of the travellers. Juliana therefore begged that the Marquis and her sister would take up their quarters at the cottage; and this invitation was gladly accepted by the fond and kind-hearted Constance—while the Marquis had no objection to offer; for the intelligence that his sister-in-law was now a married woman, naturally led him to believe and hope that she was at length respectably settled in life. We should here observe that when Mary-Anne perceived a lady folded in the arms of the Marchioness, and in that lady quickly recognised Juliana, she was herself seized with astonishment. Juliana lost no time in saying something kind to her sister's faithful dependant, who was still more surprised on being informed of the lady's marriage. The whole scene was therefore one of considerable excitement, and of no mean interest for several of the persons who figured in it.

The Marquis directed that the valet and the maid should follow the carriage to the village-inn, and take up their quarters there: for a glance at the cottage, showed him that its dimensions would not afford accommodation for too large a company. He and the Marchioness then followed Juliana into the dwelling; and while the table was being spread with materials for supper, the two sisters again embraced each other. Indeed, Constance

was overjoyed at this unexpected but most welcome meeting with one on whose account she had suffered much anxiety for a long time past; and infinite was her pleasure to learn that Juliana had made a match of which she spoke with so much pride and satisfaction. But where was her husband? In the first excitement of the encounter, Juliana had forgotten to inform her sister and brother-in-law that the Count de Toledo was absent on a visit to his estates in Catalonia. One explanation led on to another; and Juliana gave a description of the political position of her husband. The Marquis of Villebelle listened with something more than attention: his countenance gradually wore a singular aspect; and in an involuntary manner, he exclaimed, "It is remarkable that, much as I know of Spain and Spanish affairs, I never heard till now, Juliana, of the nobleman whom you have espoused."

Juliana gazed with an uncontrollable sensation of affright and horrified dismay upon her brother-in-law, as he gave utterance to those words. All her suspicions—hitherto so vague and indefinite—flamed up again in her mind, but with a brighter intelligence: so that she was smitten with the awful thought that, after all, her husband was an impostor. Constance caught her by the hand,—exclaiming, "Juliana dearest, what in heaven's name is the matter? I am sure Etienne did not purpose to wound your feelings."

"Far—very far from it," said the Marquis quickly. "It is not a reason that there should be no such nobleman, because I have never heard of him. I *may* have even heard of him—and yet have forgotten it. My words were inconsiderate and unguarded. Titles are most plentiful in Spain; and it is impossible for any one man's head to retain the recollection of them all. Pray pardon me, Juliana!"

"Say no more upon the subject," interrupted his sister-in-law, considerably relieved by all that he had just said, and angry with herself that she should so suddenly have yielded to those wild fears and terrific apprehensions.

"I have an adventure to relate to you, Juliana," said Constance, thus seeking to turn the conversation into another channel. "Yes—it was an adventure quite romantic in its way, I can assure you—though by no means agreeable for many reasons. The fright and the loss——"

"What, then, was this adventure?" inquired Juliana, whose interest and curiosity were now excited by her sister's words.

"An adventure with banditti," resumed Constance. "It happened yesterday, in the broad daylight. We were travelling through the north-eastern part of Catalonia, and in a wild desolate district,—when all of a sudden the carriage was surrounded by at least a dozen men, armed to the teeth."

"Heavens, what an adventure!" ejaculated Juliana, shuddering with affright.

"But I can assure you," said the Marquis, "that your sister bore herself with the utmost fortitude. As you may suppose, resistance was entirely vain, as it would also have been perilous against such a horde of desperadoes. The consequence was that as they experienced no opposition, they behaved courteously enough."

"You have forgotten one little circumstance, dear Etienne," said Constance; "and you are not exactly representing the facts as they positively occurred. For, the moment the carriage was stopped, you seized your pistols, and gave the men to understand that you would use them. But I besought you not to endanger your life thus madly——"

"And I was compelled to submit," added the Marquis, smiling. "Well, perhaps it was all for the best: for, as I have said, resistance would indeed have proved utterly vain. The captain of the band—who was certainly the most decent fellow for a bandit that ever figured otherwise than on a stage in a melodrama—came up to the carriage-window, and in very excellent French assured us that not the slightest violence should be offered us if we only remained quiet. He even went so far as to say that our articles of jewellery should be left us, and that our domestics should not be despoiled at all, if we only gave up whatsoever ready money we had in our possession. Now, it unfortunately happened that there was a casket in the carriage, containing about twenty thousand francs in gold and silver——"

"Eight hundred pounds sterling," observed Constance; "and the whole of this sum did the brigands self-appropriate,—leaving us however the little we happened to have in our purses, and faithfully fulfilling their pledge in respect to our jewellery, as well as the property of the servants. They did not even ransack our trunks and boxes—but appeared perfectly well content with the rich booty in the shape of specie that fell into their hands."

"And well they might be!" ejaculated the Marquis. "But I rather think that their great forbearance was not altogether owing to good feeling on their part—but may be also ascribed to terror, lest one of the flying columns which the Captain-General of Catalonia has sent out to sweep the Principality of the banditti who infest it, should have suddenly appeared upon the spot. Hence the expeditious mode with which the scoundrels transacted their business. They decamped with their booty; and when we reached the next village, we were informed that there was little doubt our plunderers were a gang which for some years have carried on their proceedings with comparative impunity, and seem to defy all the vigilance of the authorities. Their commander is known as Ramon de Collantes: and though an immense sum is set upon his head, yet his comrades are evidently too faithful to betray him."

"This was indeed a romantic but a frightful adventure!" exclaimed Juliana; "and I congratulate you both upon having passed through it on terms so comparatively cheap."

The conversation was continued until a late hour,—when the Marquis and Constance were conducted to the chamber prepared for their reception; and Juliana retired to her own. She could not however immediately close her eyes in sleep: the remarks which had fallen from the lips of her brother-in-law in respect to her husband, continued to haunt her; and though she endeavoured to tranquillise herself with a review of the observations which he had subsequently made to qualify the effect of the first, she could not shake off a certain uneasy feeling. When slumber at length visited her, that feeling still pursued her and raised up all kinds of images of terror to

people her dreams. The night which she thus passed was restless, troubled, and disturbed; and when she awoke in the morning, it was with an aching head and careworn looks.

The Marquis of Villebelle rose at a somewhat early hour, and descended to walk in the garden before breakfast. Juliana saw him from the window of her own bed-chamber, thus sauntering along the gravel-walks and amusing himself with the contemplation of the floral beauties profusely scattered about. She caught herself sighing as she envied the lot of her sister, who was married to a nobleman that lay under no political ban—who in a very short time had pushed himself up, by his own merits and talents, from complete obscurity to a high diplomatic position—and whose personal appearance was infinitely superior to that of her own husband the Count de Toledo.

While she was thus giving way to her reflections, and performing her toilet, she heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs approaching along the road; and again hastening to the window, she in a few moments perceived that it was her husband. She waved her kerchief in token of welcome; and he answered the salutation in a similar manner. At that instant she caught sight of Villebelle, who was in the front garden; and she noticed that he flung rapid glances from the horseman who had stopped at the gate, up to the window where she was thus waving her kerchief. Then the Marquis advanced hurriedly towards that gate, just as the Count de Toledo alighted; and it struck Juliana, as well as she could judge from the distance of about twenty yards, that there was a startling recognition between her brother-in-law and her husband. Was it possible they had met before, and that the Marquis could have forgotten the Count's name? or had the Count borne some other denomination when they had thus previously encountered each other? Juliana remained at the window gazing forth; the Marquis and her husband stood conversing for a few moments; and while the groom hastened forth to take charge of the horse, they walked away together along one of the shady avenues in the garden. Assuredly, thought Juliana to herself, they must have met before; and now they were probably conversing on past occurrences familiar to them both. But she nevertheless considered it strange and unkind that her husband did not at once come up to embrace her.

In a few more minutes the Marquis and the Count emerged from the shady avenue, and approached the cottage. They entered together: Juliana heard them both ascend the stairs: the Marquis passed into the chamber which himself and Constance had occupied,—the Count entering that where Juliana was dressing. He clasped her in his arms, and seemed more fervid than ever in the caresses which he bestowed upon her. When these endearments were over, and she had leisure to contemplate him, she was struck with his pallid and careworn looks: but he hastened to assure her that he had ridden throughout the whole of the past night in order to rejoin her again as soon as possible. Then he renewed his caresses, and appeared so happy in their reunion that she could not at once begin to question him on those various points concerning which she had made up her mind to solicit the most candid as well as the completest explanations.

"And so accident has thrown your brother-in-law and sister in your way?" said the Count. "The Marquis and I have met before. It was some time back—in my father's life-time—and ere I succeeded to my title."

This explanation, given in her husband's wonted off-hand manner, produced an indescribable relief in Juliana's mind. She saw at once that he was all he had represented himself to be: or else Villebelle could not ere now have recognised him as such;—for that he had done so, she naturally inferred from the fact of their walking and conversing together; and moreover her husband would not give her an assurance which the Marquis could presently disprove.

"By the bye," continued the Count, "your brother-in-law has been telling me of his adventure in Catalonia——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Juliana, as a recollection struck her: "perhaps it was the terrible Ramon de Collantes and his formidable band who waylaid you on that occasion when you were wounded?"

"Very probable," answered the Count. "But hasten and finish your toilet, dearest Juliana: for the Marquis and Marchioness purpose to take their leave immediately after breakfast. I myself—to speak candidly—am so exhausted with my night's travel, that I shall lie down and take a little repose. If I see not his lordship again ere his departure, pray make my best excuses."

Juliana descended to the parlour where the breakfast-table was spread, and where she found the Marquis and Marchioness awaiting her presence. Constance at once threw herself into her sister's arms; and Juliana was for a moment surprised at the effusion of grief which convulsed the Marchioness. She wept and sobbed bitterly: but Juliana thought to herself that it was quite a natural outpouring of Constance's affectionate disposition at the idea of so speedy a separation after being so brief a space together. Presently the Marchioness grew more composed: but she looked very pale, and even ill—and seemed much desponding. The Marquis himself had a certain air of restraint which he endeavoured to shake off: but he could not. Juliana's keen glance and wide experience of human nature convinced her that there was something on his mind; and now she likewise coupled the grief of Constance with this suspicion. She herself grew restless and uneasy; and there was a sort of vague terror hanging upon her soul.

"You knew my husband before?" she said to the Marquis: and the very words she thus uttered, seemed to her imagination to connect themselves with all the undefined apprehensions that were uppermost in her thoughts.

"Yes: we have met before," responded the Marquis.

"And he was not then the Count of Toledo?" said Juliana.

"He was not then the Count of Toledo," answered the Marquis, repeating her words in a manner which struck her as still more singular than even his constrained air had previously done.

"There is something strange about you, Etienne!" she exclaimed, unable to control her feelings; "and something strange about you likewise, Constance!"

"Constance," the Marquis hastened to observe,

"is afflicted at the idea of parting from you so soon."

Juliana gazed very hard at her sister to see if the looks of the latter corroborated this assertion; and the Marchioness murmured, "Yes, dearest Juliana, believe me—Oh, believe me! it well nigh breaks my heart to separate from you thus."

"My husband," Juliana went on to observe, "regrets that excessive fatigue should have so absolutely prostrated him as to prevent him doing the honours of the breakfast-table:"—but as she thus delivered herself of the excuse with which she had been charged, it struck her that the very apology itself was insufficient to account for the absence of the Count from his proper place when hospitality was to be shown to those who had become connected with him by marriage: for she now thought that he might have borne up at least another hour against his sense of weariness, however excessive it might be.

"Now, dearest Constance," said the Marquis, "hasten and get ready to depart. The carriage is doubtless repaired by this time; and we must pursue our journey towards Paris without delay."

"But, Ah!" ejaculated Juliana, as a sudden recollection struck her: "you are without funds—you were plundered of them. Doubtless the Count has ample resources with him: I will procure you a supply——"

Constance hurried from the room: but ere the door closed behind her, Juliana's ear caught a half-smothered convulsing sob; while the Marquis, expressing his thanks for the proposal she had just made, went on to observe, "it is not necessary to avail ourselves of your kindness: for at the first large town which we reach, any banker there will cash my draft upon Paris."

"Now, tell me, Etienne," said Juliana, looking earnestly in her brother-in-law's countenance; "is there anything weighing upon my sister's mind, and weighing upon your's also? But Ah! methinks I understand," she ejaculated, with a sudden access of bitterness in her tone, as a thought smote her brain. "You know my husband to be a man of the highest honour and the strictest probity—you know likewise that in becoming his wife, I must have deceived him in respect to my own antecedents: you have recognised in him a friend of former times—and you feel shocked that he should have been thus deceived! Oh, do not deny it! I now comprehend it all! And my sister—she trembles lest the Count should discover my past frailties, and that he should wreak upon me a terrible Spanish vengeance. Tell me, is it not so?"

"Juliana," responded Villebelle, addressing her in a solemn tone, "it is painful—most painful thus to refer to the past. I beseech you to dwell no longer upon it. But one word more ere we separate. If, Juliana, you should ever require the succour or the consolation of friends, rest assured that you will not apply in vain to your sister or myself. Unfortunately your husband is indeed proscribed——"

"Ah!—and his estates are all confiscated?" ejaculated Juliana. "I have feared so for some time past: but through kindness he has forborne from revealing the sad, sad truth!"

"Believe me, Juliana," continued the Marquis, gravely and earnestly, "your husband is proscribed beyond all hope of ever having the ban lifted from off his head. Every time that he crosses the Pyrenean frontier he risks his life——I am compelled to speak plainly—he incurs the chance of being shot summarily, or dragged ignominiously up to the scaffold's platform!"

"Good heavens!" cried Juliana, clasping her hands in despair: "are his persecutors so rancorous? But," she ejaculated, catching at the slightest gleam of hope, "may not a change of Ministry——"

"No change of Ministry can benefit him," responded Villebelle. "It is my duty, painful though it be, to assure you that he is proscribed beyond redemption. He has solemnly promised me, during the few minutes we ere now conversed together, that he will remain altogether in France. If you wish to preserve your husband to yourself, you will add the weight of your influence to induce him to keep this pledge. I understand he has brought ample funds away with him from Catalonia on this occasion——"

"Doubtless from a friendly source?" ejaculated Juliana inquiringly.

"Yes: from a source where reimbursement never will be demanded," responded Villebelle. "But let him leave this neighbourhood. While on the Pyrenean frontier, there will ever be a temptation to induce him to cross it. Urge him, Juliana, to remove farther into the interior of France: tell him that for the sake of his life you yourself voluntarily and cheerfully renounce every hope of accompanying him into Spain; and persuade him to turn his attention to some pursuit by which he may earn his livelihood in this country. Do you promise me to follow this advice? do you pledge yourself to make sacrifices for the sake of him who has become your husband?"

"Is his position, then, really so hopeless?" inquired Juliana, with a sickening sensation at the heart, as all her fine dreams of enacting the feudal peeress in a castellated mansion on a Catalan domain, seemed to dissipate like the mists of morning when the sun is up.

"It is hopeless!" answered Villebelle. "Painful——nay, even more—torturing to me though it is, to be thus compelled to speak such truths, every one of which must penetrate like a dagger into your heart, it is nevertheless my duty as your brother-in-law, and for your sister's sake, to speak thus openly. Now, fail not, Juliana, to follow the counsel which I so earnestly and so disinterestedly give you!"

"I will, Etienne," she answered—but it was almost in a dying tone: for though now utterly relieved from her first apprehensions that she had married an impostor, she yet had the frightful conviction forced upon her that her husband was a proscribed outlaw, and a pauper dependent upon the bounties of friendship.

At this moment the Marchioness of Villebelle returned to the room; and the Marquis hastened to say to her, "Constance dearest, I have told Juliana all that it was agreed between you and me that I should tell her. She has faithfully pledged herself to follow my advice; and I therefore conjure you to control your own feelings as much as possible, so that the parting moments need not be unnecessarily embittered."

Constance did her best to obey her beloved

husband's injunctions: but she could not altogether subdue her emotions; and it was amidst bitterest tears and sobs that she murmured the last farewell.

"Remember, Juliana!" said the Marquis, with a significant look, as he pressed his sister-in-law's hand: and he then hastily conducted his wife out of the cottage.

CHAPTER CLXVI.

THE FLIGHT.

JULIANA was now alone in the parlour, whence her brother-in-law and sister had just issued forth; and most lonely indeed did she feel. Her heart experienced a desolation such as it had scarcely ever known before,—no, not even when her exposure was effected by Mr. Hawkshaw at Saxondale Castle—nor again when she beheld all her cunningly devised plans in respect to the Viscount de Chateauneuf shattered to pieces. It was true, she thought to herself, that she had not married an impostor in rank: but she had espoused a beggar with regard to purse—and her prospects seemed gloomy indeed.

Suddenly she bethought herself that she had not ascertained from her husband how much money he had on this occasion brought back with him from Spain; and she ascended for this purpose to the chamber where he had lain down to rest. She was in one of those moods when it was little likely she would trouble herself about disturbing him in the midst of slumber; and she entered abruptly, without any precaution. He was not asleep; and rising up, sat on the bed, surveying her for a few moments with a peculiar look. He at once saw that there was a considerable change in her manner towards him; and for an instant an expression of uneasiness flitted over his features: but quickly composing them again, he said, "Have they taken their departure?"

"They have," responded Juliana. "Will you have the goodness to inform me what amount you have brought with you from the other side of the Pyrenees?—for methinks that therein consists our entire fortune."

"I have some twenty-five thousand francs," replied the Count de Toledo—the sum which he thus specified, being a thousand pounds in English money.

"And when that sum is gone, how are we to live?" asked Juliana. "Of course you cannot fail to understand that I now know everything—that your estates are confiscated—that your position is hopeless—and that you must never again think of revisiting your native land. Indeed, I fear that so far from having received any supplies at the hands of your intendant, you must be largely indebted to the bounty of your friends; and I do not see how you will ever acquit yourself of these liabilities."

Juliana spoke in a cold manner, but yet with a certain degree of bitterness in her accents; while her husband listened with silent attention until she had finished, and his eyes were fixed keenly and searchingly upon her.

"If my estates be in reality all confiscated," he observed, "you do not, I presume, intend to make the circumstance a subject of reproach?"

"To speak frankly," answered Juliana, "I do not think you acted well by concealing from me, when you offered marriage, the real position in which you were placed in respect to your Government, and the possibility—nay, more—the probability of your estates being confiscated by the advent of a hostile Ministry to power. You should have dealt candidly with me——"

"And pray, Juliana," interrupted the Count de Toledo, his features assuming a sudden expression of mingled fierceness and hardihood, "did you deal with the fullest frankness towards me?"

"What mean you?" ejaculated the lady, seized with trepidation as all her antecedents swept through her mind.

"I mean," rejoined her husband, "that when you informed me you were Lady Saxondale's daughter—that your brother was Lord Saxondale—that your sister had married Villebelle the eminent diplomatist, you forgot to add certain little incidents in respect to yourself."

"Ah!" murmured Juliana, becoming pale as death: but with a desperate effort to regain her effrontery, she said in a haughty tone, "If calumniating tongues have made themselves busy with my name,—you, as my husband, ought to defend me, instead of having, even for a single moment, the appearance of attaching credibility to the whisperings of scandal."

"I am afraid, Juliana," answered the Count de Toledo, "that it would be rather a difficult thing to convince the Durands that you did not live with them under the name of Madame Chesterfield—that you were not in a way to become a mother when residing beneath their roof—and that you did not, even then and there, intrigue with the Viscount de Chateauneuf."

Juliana sank down upon a seat, like one annihilated. It was utterly impossible to deny facts which had evidently come with all corroborative details to her husband's knowledge. At that instant she hated him: she felt that whatsoever degree of affection—or rather of liking towards him, which his own love had engendered in her mind, was now completely destroyed: for the instant that he became an accuser, she viewed him in the light of an enemy.

"Now, Juliana, you perceive," he said, addressing her in a milder and more soothing voice, "that if there were any deficiency of candour on my side, there was far more on your's. Whatsoever concealment was practised by me was the veriest trifle, in comparison to that adopted by you. But I do not intend to give utterance to reproaches: I should not have made these allusions at all, were it not to convince you that you had no right to upbraid me."

"And have you all along been acquainted with those circumstances?" inquired Juliana, still covered with shame and confusion.

"No," responded the Count. "But let me tell you that at the very first, when our acquaintance began, I suspected there was something peculiar attached to your history. A young lady, unmarried, living apart from her family——But no matter! it is useless to dwell upon details. Suffice it to say that I never knew the whole truth

until the other day, when I met the Durands in Spain——"

"Ah! you met them?" ejaculated Juliana. "They told you that they saw me in the village—they revealed everything——vile gossips, treacherous scandalmongers that they are!"—and her countenance was flushed with indignation and rage.

"You would indeed do well never to speak to them again, if you should happen to encounter them," observed her husband quickly. "And now, Juliana, no more in respect to the past!—there shall be no upbraidings on either side. Whatever you may have been, I love you: you know that I love you—and that is sufficient!"

It was *not* however sufficient for Juliana. As we have already said, her own liking towards the Count had suddenly been altered into a sentiment very much resembling hatred. She felt that he had deceived her in respect to his true position; and for this she experienced rancour against him. But in order to silence her upbraidings, he had suddenly taken the far higher ground of an accuser: he had conquered—he had subdued her: she had been humiliated in his presence—she had not even the satisfaction of giving additional vent to her own feelings of animosity against him. Her pride was in every way humbled;—and such a position was not at all a pleasurable one for the Countess de Toledo. Moreover, she could not help fancying that she was not as yet fully acquainted with the worst in respect to her husband. The recollection of that man who was represented to have been a labourer on his estates, and who had extorted large sums from him, haunted her mind. She remembered, likewise, that the letters which she had written to her sister, had been entrusted to the Count to be conveyed to the post, but had never reached their destination. It was evident he had suppressed them,—doubtless, thought Juliana, be-

cause he feared the knowledge of his actual position must inevitably reach her if she corresponded with Constance. But she dared not prolong the discourse with her husband by demanding fresh explanations: he was acquainted with a portion of her past life's shame, and could thus silence her with a word. But she felt that henceforth all confidence was at an end between them. On *her* side there would be mistrust of all her husband's proceedings, if at all mysterious: and on *his* side there could be no very exalted opinion of his wife's virtue.

A few days after the departure of the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle,—who, it should be observed, were on a temporary trip to Paris, his lordship still retaining the Spanish Embassy,—the Count de Toledo drove Juliana out in the phaeton. They made, as usual, a considerable circuit of the delightful scenery of the neighbourhood; and as they were returning through the village, they perceived some travellers just alighting from a post-chaise which had at the moment stopped at the inn. These travellers were an elderly gentleman and lady; and Juliana, recognising them at the first glance, ejaculated, "Those vile Durands!"

"The Durands?" echoed the Count de Toledo: and at the same moment the eyes of the old gentleman and his wife were turned upon himself and Juliana.

Quick as lightning did the Count toss the reins to Juliana, bidding her drive on; and springing from the vehicle, he hastened up to the Durands, from whose lips burst forth ejaculations which to Juliana's ears sounded as indicative of a most unwelcome recognition. The Count said something in a low hurried tone to the Durands; and they at once accompanied him into the hotel. Juliana was much amazed at witnessing all these proceedings, —as were likewise the stable-men and postilions, who were changing the horses. She drove slowly on, utterly bewildered as to what it could all mean,—her husband's precipitate movements—the Durands' ejaculations—and that sudden entrance of the three into the village hostelry! But as Juliana's thoughts grew more collected, she concluded that her husband was very probably intent upon inducing the Durands, either by threats or persuasion, to abstain from propagating reports in that neighbourhood, which would prove ruinous to her own reputation.

She drove slowly on towards the cottage; and in about ten minutes the Count de Toledo rejoined her there. She was about to question him as to what had taken place, and whether the Durands had been completely silenced,—when he hurried past her, with a few words to the effect that he would tell her everything presently—and rushed up-stairs to the bedchamber. In a few moments he descended again; and sped away from the cottage. What could this mean? Had he paid a visit to the strong-box? was some deep inroad now being made upon their funds? had the Durands demanded a bribe as the price of their secrecy, notwithstanding that they had just become enriched by the death of their relation at Barcelona? Yet in no other way could Juliana account for her husband's hasty and excited proceedings; and she thought to herself that if their pecuniary resources were thus to be so continuously encroached upon by extortionate demands, they would soon be reduced to the most necessitous straits. Anxiously did she await the Count's return. In about half-an-hour he came back: but there was a visible trouble upon his features. She scarcely dared to question him—for she felt assured that in whatsoever answers he might have to give, reference to her past shame must be inevitably made.

"You are probably surprised, Juliana," he said, after three or four agitated turns to and fro in the parlour, "at what has just occurred. But no——you can scarcely be surprised: you must have comprehended full well——"

"Those vile Durands insisted on a bribe?" said the Countess hurriedly.

"Yes: and for your sake I was compelled to submit to their extortionate demands. Our funds are now reduced to a few thousand francs."

"Heavens!" ejaculated Juliana; "have those detestable people plundered you to such a fearful extent?"

"They have," rejoined the Count; "and I almost regret that I submitted to their demands. I have no faith in them—I tremble lest, notwithstanding the bribe, they should be base enough to betray what they know! Juliana," he added suddenly, "we must leave this neighbourhood!"

"Yes, yes," she exclaimed: "that has been my wish for some days past—indeed ever since my sister and brother-in-law were here. Let us go farther into the interior of France—let us realize, by the sale of the horses and carriages, as much money as we can get together——"

"But Juliana, if we remain in France, how are we to live?" inquired the Count. "Neither yourself nor I are accustomed to habits of frugality: we cannot all in a moment settle ourselves down to economies which would amount to absolute privations."

"I can obtain certain supplies from my mother," exclaimed Juliana.

"Not enough to enable us to live comfortably," rejoined the Count; "and I am not one who can devote himself to any employment for the purpose of increasing our resources. No!—things have come to a crisis—the die is cast—my resolution is taken!"

"To do what?" demanded Juliana, as in sudden affright she anticipated the reply to her question.

"To return into Spain," he said, his features becoming all in a moment sternly and fiercely resolute.

"To dare death?" ejaculated Juliana. "No—it must not be! The Marquis of Villebelle conjured me to use my influence to prevent you from adopting so mad a course."

"But it is necessary, Juliana: it is our only alternative! There I can always command funds," he added, with a sort of exultation; "but here, on this side of the Pyrenees, we may have to encounter poverty. Nay, more—we shall never be safe against extortions and exactions. Settle where we will, the Durands may find us out: and what *then* becomes of your reputation? Juliana, I am decided: we go into Spain! Trust to me, to devise means for ensuring my own safety. You possess a strong mind—a fine spirit: you are equal to the emergency of danger——"

"But is it possible that you purpose to go boldly to your estate?" inquired the Countess: "will you take possession of your mansion?"

"I will go into the midst of my people," exclaimed the Count de Toledo, once more with that tone and look of exultation which his countenance had already worn during this discourse;—"and rest assured, they will not suffer me to be captured so long as life remains in them!"

"But is not this a desperate mode of existence upon which we are about to enter?" asked Juliana: "will it not be a far more troubled and unsettled one, than our life would be if we were to remain in France, even though subjected to extortions and threats of exposure?"

"Juliana, it is useless to reason against my resolve," replied the Count. "We go into Spain. To-morrow I will dispose of the carriages: whatsoever little debts are outstanding, shall be paid. The horses we will keep for our own purposes; and on the following day will we cross the frontier."

Juliana could not urge any farther remonstrance: she saw that her husband was resolute; and she endeavoured to tranquillize herself with the reflection that his position perhaps would not be so very perilous, after all, in the midst of his own dependants,—or else he would scarcely be so outrageously rash as to carry his project into execution. At all events, she felt that no danger could be incurred by herself; and if the worst ensued, she would be left a widow with an honourable title, though her husband perished on the political scaffold. She now cared too little for him to be particularly afflicted at the contemplation of this eventuality: while, on the other hand, if he should really be enabled to maintain himself in the repossession of his estates, she might yet play the part of the feudal baroness, as she had so much longed to do. She was well aware that Spain was in an unsettled condition—that the authority of the central government at Madrid was but indifferently maintained over the spirited population of Catalonia: and the longer she reflected on the course about to be entered upon, the more did she deem it probable that her husband's views might be carried out, and that the warnings of her brother-in-law would prove to have been stretched and overstrained.

It was a little after ten o'clock in the evening of this same day, that the Count and Juliana retired to their chamber. But scarcely had they ascended thither, when a trampling of horses' feet, and sounds as if of the clatter of weapons, coming from the main road, met their ears. In an instant the Count threw open the window: the moonlight flooded the atmosphere—and the figures of several mounted *gendarmes* were distinctly visible to himself and Juliana. They had already sprung from their steeds; and it was the din of their steel-sheathed swords clattering against their sides, which had reached their ears. A wild but vague terror suddenly seized on Juliana: nor was her alarm dissipated, when the Count, abruptly closing the window, said, "We must fly!"

"Fly! Wherefore? whither?" demanded his wife in an agony of apprehension. "What have you done? why come the officers of justice here?"

"We must fly, Juliana!" ejaculated the Count: "there is not a moment to lose! I will explain everything presently! Fasten on your riding-skirt—quick! quick! Follow me!"

She obeyed mechanically, and with all the haste of wild and nervous alarm;—indeed, she was too much bewildered for deliberate reflection. Her husband filled his pockets with all the coin that remained in the casket: they descended the stairs precipitately, and passed out by a back door to the stable. Two horses were saddled and bridled in almost the twinkling of an eye,—Juliana thus caparisoning her own steed for herself, which she well knew how to do; and she had all the ready activity of fortitude at this moment, notwithstanding the wild vague terrors which filled her soul.

"Now courage, Juliana!" said the Count, as he lifted her on her horse: and the next moment he sprang upon his own. "Away!"

As he uttered this last word, the loud knocking of the *gendarmes* at the cottage-door reached their ears; and it should be observed that all these proceedings on their part, conducted with such lightning rapidity, had been unobserved by the officers of justice,—inasmuch as they took place entirely in the rear of the dwelling, while the *gendarmes* had approached the cottage from the front.

"Away!"—that word was the signal for their departure.

They dashed through the back-garden: the low fence separating it from the orchard, was cleared by the two steeds: but in the orchard itself a couple of *gendarmes*, on foot, at once sprang towards them. It was evident that the precincts of the cottage were surrounded by the officers: but a word of encouragement burst from the Count's lips—with the speed of a hurricane the two animals dashed through the orchard—a carbine was fired by one of the *gendarmes*—the next moment the report of his companion's weapon likewise rang through the air—and the bullets whistled past the ears of the fugitives. The hedge at the extremity of the orchard, was cleared: the steeds, stretching forth like greyhounds, sped over the meadows—until, in a few minutes, the road to Perpignan was reached, after the short but rapid circuit thus made. Meantime the cry of an escape had rung from the lips of the *gendarmes*: their horses were remounted—and a chase was quickly instituted. It was however ineffectual: the Count and Juliana rode on as if upon the wings of the wind; and when they presently halted to listen, as well as to breathe their panting coursers, no sounds of pursuit reached their ears from behind.

"You have borne yourself bravely, Juliana!" cried the Count, in thrilling tones of exultation.

"But what means all this?" inquired his wife. "In the name of heaven, tell me—wherefore came those officers? what have you done?"

"Away, away, Juliana!" exclaimed her husband: "this is no moment for explanations!"

Once more did the steeds career along, although there were still no sounds of pursuit: the *gendarmes* were evidently either distanced or at fault. Ever and anon, when the swiftness of the fugitives' pace was relaxed, Juliana wildly, vehemently, and passionately demanded what her husband had done that he should fly from the officers?—but on each occasion he compelled her to urge on her courser again; and thus they proceeded for a couple of hours, until Perpignan was in sight,—its buildings upreared, like dark crags, against the horizon of the sky that was flooded with the moonlight.

"This way!" exclaimed the Count: and they swept into a by-road which enabled them to leave

Perpignan far away on the left,—while by a short cut they reached the eastern extremity of the Pyrenees. On they went,—scarcely relaxing their speed until long past midnight,—when the Count suddenly exclaimed in an exultant voice, "The boundary is crossed! we are now in Spain!"

Juliana was much exhausted: and though they now walked their steeds, many minutes elapsed ere she could recover breath sufficiently to renew the vehement inquiries which she had already put a dozen times during the journey, but to which she had received no satisfactory answer.

"Now will you tell me," she said, in a peremptory and imperious voice, as if determined not to be put off any longer,—"will you tell me wherefore the officers of justice should have sought you—and why you fled from them?"

"In a short time, Juliana," responded her husband, in a voice that still vibrated with a strange wild exultation,—"you shall know all. Interrogate me not now! It is useless: you cannot force me to answer."

"But I insist!" she cried, once more full of a vague and unknown terror. "There is something fearfully unnatural in all this!"

"There will be something thrillingly exciting for you presently," rejoined the Count. "Ah! I already feel a different being: it seems to me as if I had escaped from a gaol to breathe the fresh air of freedom! Come on, Juliana dearest—come on, my gloriously handsome wife!—and in a brief space, soon after morning dawns, our destination will be reached!"

"Go we direct to your mansion?" asked Juliana, somewhat encouraged, as well as to a certain degree dispossessed of her fears, by the exuberant spirits which the Count de Toledo now displayed.

"We go to our home, Juliana," he responded; "and again make yourself happy with the assurance that you will find persons there who will not fail to protect your husband."

"But if your estates have been confiscated," said Juliana, bewildered with her thoughts, "were they not bestowed upon some one else? or have they not been sold? and will you not find your mansion in the hands of a new possessor?"

"No fear of all that!" cried the Count. "So long as I enjoy freedom, I defy the powers or the terrors of the law to prevent me from treading at will over my domain in wild mountainous Catalonia! And as for my mansion—I repeat, you will see none but friendly faces there. Come, Juliana—let us speed onward again. I am in haste to introduce you to your new home!"

The Countess longed to repeat her question, as to wherefore her husband should have fled from the *gendarmes:* but there was now so much authority in his manner—he had assumed an air of so much conscious superiority and power, from the first moment that the boundary was crossed—that she felt somewhat overawed—her naturally proud spirit quailed—and she dared not again venture upon peremptory or imperious interrogatory. They continued their way: the town of Figueras was passed upon the left hand: they plunged deeper and deeper into the wilds of Catalonia; and as the first glimmering of dawn appeared above the eastern hills, they came within sight of a tower the gray summit of which was uppeared above a grove of cork-trees.

"Behold our home!" exclaimed the Count de Toledo, pointing in the direction of the structure.

Juliana's first impression was that this tower was merely a small portion of a large castellated edifice which would presently develop itself to her view: but she was surprised that if they were now on her husband's domain, there should be no signs of culture—no cottages, where his dependants dwelt, scattered about—no herds grazing—no flocks pasturing. The entire scenery, as she swept her looks around, was wild and savage—in some instances, however, sublime and grand, with towering height and roaring waterfall. But still, if this were a sample of the estate, it struck her that no matter how vast the domain belonging to her husband, it was a miracle if it produced any revenues at all.

"Are we upon the soil that calls you lord?" she asked, with a strange and unaccountable timidity.

"Yes: far as the eye can reach on every side!"—and there was still exultation in his tone.

Juliana liked not the response; and yet she scarcely knew wherefore. She thought to herself that in compensation for this savage and unproductive portion of the domain, there must be other parts well cultured and exceedingly profitable. They now entered the wood of cork-trees, and ascended a rising path towards the entrance of the tower. The dawn was brightening; and Juliana perceived, through the vista of the trees, that the edifice was half in ruins—that it was of small dimensions—and that it stood alone, utterly unconnected with the spacious array of buildings, which, with casements, balconies, turrets, and pinnacles, she had expected to break upon her view. The immense lawn upon which she fancied it might look—the gravelled walk—the pieces of artificial water—the fruit and flower gardens—the outhouses for numerous dependants—the adjacent parks and pleasure-grounds—and the meadows covered with flocks and herds,—all the evidences, in short, of wealth—all the external show of luxury and comfort, which she had anticipated to behold ——where were they? She looked around in wild terror: there was something dismal and dreary, awful and dispiriting, in the aspect of the sombre wood—mean and sordid, poverty-stricken and gaol-like, in the old ruined tower.

"Where is your mansion?" she asked, hurriedly and excitedly, of her husband.

"There—before you!" was his response, as he pointed to the tower.

"That?" shrieked forth Juliana, well nigh falling from her horse. "And those people—those wild-looking people?" she added, as several men and women, in the picturesque mountaineer costume of Catalonia—but the former carrying guns in their hands and having swords by their sides—suddenly emerged from the tower.

"Those are my people!" replied her husband. "The women will be your attendants—the men will fight for me until the very death."

"Great God!" said Juliana, in a dying voice. "Who are you?——Speak! who are you?"

"I am Ramon de Collantes!" rejoined the false Count de Toledo: and his arm was at the same instant thrown round his wife's form, as with a piercing shriek she was about to tumble headlong from her horse.

CHAPTER CLXVII.

THE BANDITTI'S TOWER.

When Juliana came back to consciousness, she found herself stretched upon a bed in a poorly furnished apartment: two of the women whom she had already seen, were bending over her, administering restoratives: her husband, standing at the foot of the curtainless couch, was gazing upon her. She seemed to be awaking from a hideous dream. Wildly her looks were flung around, as if to acquire evidences that she dreamt no longer: then, as the sickening, horrifying conviction swept in upon her soul, that everything she fancied was indeed but too terribly true, she closed her eyes again, as if to shut out whatsoever objects made her thus keenly alive to her fearful position. Slowly however she opened those orbs once more; and in mute consternation—under the influence of an awful numbing dismay—she looked slowly around.

The one small window was deeply set in the thick masonry of the chamber, and had no drapery. A rude table—a few chairs—a rug upon the floor—the bed she lay on—and some other trifling articles of furniture, constituted the appointments of the room in which the brilliant Juliana, who at Saxondale House had slept upon down, and beneath a canopy of velvet, with draperies of satin and muslin, now found herself. The two women who ministered unto her, were exceedingly handsome; and with their picturesque apparel, and the profusion of jewellery which decorated their persons, they seemed far superior to the wretchedness of their abode. Her husband, as already stated, was standing at the foot of the bed,—watching with an outward air of calmness the effect which would be produced in his wife by this awakening to the consciousness of her position. His arms were folded across his breast: he looked like one who was resolute to meet whatsoever upbraidings might be levelled against him, and to glory in the fact that he was the famous robber-chief Ramon de Collantes.

He now made a sign for the two women to leave the chamber; and when they had departed, he took a chair and sat down by the side of the couch. Juliana shuddered visibly at his approach. For an instant a look of sternest displeasure appeared upon his countenance: but as it quickly passed away, he said in a lofty tone, as if he chose to rise high above all reproach and upbraiding which might be vented against him, "Now, Juliana, at length you are in the home to which you have so much longed to come!"

"This my home?" she exclaimed, with another visible tremor, as her eyes swept around the dreary, desolate apartment. "No, no—I will not remain here! Let me go hence! I will depart alone!"—and she sprang up from the couch.

"Not so, Juliana!" said her husband, catching her by the wrist, and compelling her to sit down by the side of the couch: though in justice it must be observed that he used no more force than was absolutely necessary. "You are my wife—and here you must remain."

"Remain here?" she ejaculated: and for an instant she was about to give vent to a violent gust of mingled rage and grief: but the demeanour of Ramon de Collantes overawed the one, and compelled her to stifle the other. "Tell me," she said, suddenly growing calm—but it was the unnatural calmness of utter despair,—"have you brought me hither to dwell amongst brigands?"

"For the last nine months you have been the wife of a brigand-chief," answered Collantes; "and you must accept your destiny."

"Yes—but I knew it not——God knows how far—how very far I was from suspecting it."

"To be sure!" ejaculated her husband: "how could it have been otherwise? We each had our secrets; and we kept them as long as we could. You had been the paramour of other men when you were wooed by me: I was a bandit-captain when I wooed you. I have promised to reproach you not: in common justice should you abstain from upbraiding me."

"But that false title which you assumed?" ejaculated Juliana, half frantic.

"I had as much right to usurp the rank of a nobleman, Juliana, as you had to assume the position of a virtuous woman. If I were a false Count when I led you to the altar, you were not a virgin-bride when you came into my arms."

"My God!" murmured the unhappy lady, again shivering all over: then suddenly she cried, "But how was it that my own maid deceived me? how was it that she assured me you were all that you represented yourself—that you visited at the Spanish Embassy in Paris——"

"Because your maid was accessible to my gold," answered Ramon de Collantes. "Do you suppose, Juliana, that I foresaw not that you would make inquiries? I knew that you were a thorough woman of the world; and I played as deep a game as your own."

"Why did you marry me?" demanded Juliana abruptly.

"Because I loved you—truly and sincerely loved you! I love you now—and shall ever love you, unless you give me cause to hate you. I more than half suspected, when I wooed you, that something had gone wrong with your antecedents. But I cared not for that! It was sufficient that you struck my fancy—and I resolved to possess you as a wife."

"And that tale of the change of Ministry, when we were travelling southward——"

"An opportunity which presented itself for devising an excuse not to bear you into Spain, but to stop short on the Pyrenean frontier, whence I myself could pay periodical visits——"

"To your intendant?" said Juliana, with bitter sarcasm.

"Do not speak thus—or I shall not love you much longer," answered Collantes, haughtily and sternly. "Rather thank me for having from time to time re-entered Catalonia to join my brave band for a few days, and levy contributions on travellers who passed by."

"And that man who had been a labourer on your estates?" said Juliana, still somewhat ironically, though not with so much bitterness as before.

"A scoundrel who was once a member of my band, but who through very cowardice deserted. For want of a passport, he lingered just over the frontier; and my evil destiny threw me, as you

saw, in his way. I was compelled to submit to the villain's extortions——"

"And that faithful valet of your's?"

"One of my band likewise—but a brave and trustworthy individual. He will join us doubtless in the course of the day: for the French *gendarmes* had no reason to molest him."

"Those letters of mine, which were directed to my sister?" said Juliana, continuing her queries.

"Think you that I was foolish enough to put you in correspondence with the Marchioness of Villebelle, when the Marquis could tell her that there was no such person as the Count de Toledo and she would have written you this much back in her very first answer? It was a cursed fatality that threw the Villebelles in the way of my brave band and myself: but we knew not who they were: we are not in the habit of inquiring the names of those travellers whom we politely detain for a few minutes on their road."

"What passed between you and the Marquis when you encountered each other at the cottage?" asked Juliana, thus continuing her feverishly rapid questions.

"Ah! that was indeed a romantic incident," ejaculated Collantes, with a laugh: "and would tell effectively upon the stage in a melodrama where brigands figure. The Marquis was walking in the garden, as you recollect. He thought he recognised me: he was astounded—he could not believe his eyes. He saw me waving my hand to some one: he looked around—he perceived you at your chamber window, agitating your kerchief. He rushed up to me, and demanded who I was. Somehow or another it instantaneously struck me who *he* must be; and I saw that I was safe.—'In Spain,' I answered, 'I am, as you suspect, Ramon de Collantes: here I am the Count de Toledo; and your sister-in-law is my wife.'—The Marquis, like every shrewd diplomatist, though he is but quite a young man—not older than myself—recovered his self-possession in an instant. I gave the horse to a groom; and we walked aside together. I offered to return him his money: but he scornfully rejected it. I asked him if he purposed to betray me? He reflected, and said that it would be better not. I told him I thought so too. But he laid down conditions, which were that I should never again cross the Pyrenees—that I should go into the interior of France—keep my feigned name—and endeavour to earn my living honourably. Of course I pledged myself to anything: for I was resolved to hide the startling truth from your knowledge as long as possible. We had a little more conversation; and I hurried up to see you: for though it was during the interval of our separation that I had obtained an insight into your antecedents, and my suspicions of your past wantonness had been fully confirmed by the Durands, yet I loved you as much as ever, and longed to embrace you. I pretended exhaustion—in the first place, because the Marquis had stipulated I should not appear before his wife; and in the second place, because I had no inclination to appear again before him, while you were present. Doubtless the Marquis went and informed your sister who your husband really was."

"Yes, yes—he did! I understand it all now," exclaimed Juliana, wringing her hands. "Good heavens! what must have been the agony of poor Constance? what must she have thought? No wonder that she wept so bitterly—that she sobbed so convulsively—that she embraced me so fervidly! Ah! and how delicately did the Marquis himself behave,—not betraying you—nor yet on his own side having recourse to falsehoods to save you from exposure!"

"The Marquis is a diplomatist," rejoined Ramon de Collantes, with a smile; "and was not likely to be at a loss how to manage such matters."

"But those Durands," exclaimed Juliana; "how fell you in with them?"

"Quite in a professional way," replied Collantes. "They were journeying towards Barcelona: I and my gallant band stopped them; and as they had no great amount of ready money about them, we examined their papers. A letter in the old gentleman's pocket-book made me aware that he was going to Barcelona to receive an inheritance.—'Oh! oh!' thought I to myself; 'we must keep you good folks prisoners for a while, until you furnish a ransom.'—So we bore them both off to the tower here; and old Durand drew a cheque upon a banker at Barcelona,—one of my men setting off to get it cashed. This caused a delay of a day or two, during which the Durands were kept close prisoners at the tower. In the course of some conversation between them, you may conceive my astonishment when I heard them talking of the Countess of Toledo whom they had recently met at a certain village. Thereupon I questioned them; and wormed out as much of your antecedents as they themselves were acquainted with. Little did they think they were making all these revelations to your own husband! Well, the man came back from Barcelona with the ransom—a thousand pounds, calculated by your English money; and the Durands were suffered to depart."

Juliana could really have forgiven her husband for this one robbery, inasmuch as it had been perpetrated upon the individuals who betrayed their knowledge of her past career.

"You may conceive," resumed Ramon de Collantes, "how terrified I was, when a few days after my return to the cottage, we beheld the Durands alighting from the post-chaise on their way homeward. I rushed up to them, as you saw me: I was only just in time to stop the ejaculations of complete betrayal which were bursting from their lips.—'Say nothing!' I whispered in a hurried voice; 'and your money shall be restored!'—They required nothing better; and I accompanied them into the inn. They had seen you with me; and as we entered the tavern, the landlord officiously exclaimed, 'Good day, my lord Count of Toledo!'—The Durands thus discovered that your husband was none other than the famous Ramon de Collantes. Knowing therefore that we resided in the neighbourhood, they unhesitatingly agreed to wait while I hastened home to get the thousand pounds to restore to them. This made an immense hole in all my share of plunder which I had brought away from Spain a few days back: but I might have put up with that loss lightly, if I could have trusted the Durands. When, however, they had received their money, and had taken their departure, I began to reflect that I was not safe with such gossips and scandal-

mongers. Therefore my resolve was taken to bid farewell to France: for, as I had plundered a French subject—although in another country—yet I was well aware that the authorities, if once put on the alert, would arrest me at a venture,—so that if a French tribunal declared itself incompetent to try me for a deed done in Spain, the *gendarmes* would nevertheless have marched me over the frontier and given me into the custody of the Spanish authorities at Figueras. Well, what I apprehended on the part of those Durands came to pass. On leaving the village, they must have given information at the very next town concerning me; and if the *gendarmes* had only done their work a little more cleverly and without so much noise, I should at this moment be in a French gaol instead of in my own tower. However, the necessity that was felt to have such a posse of officers to effect the capture, was the highest compliment that could be paid to your renowned husband Don Ramon de Collantes. Now, I think all explanations have been given; and you have nothing to do, Juliana, but to resign yourself to your new mode of life."

"Ramon!" said the lady, falling upon her knees at her bandit-husband's feet, "I beseech you to let me depart hence! You say that you love me——"

"Yes, Juliana—and too well to lose you," interrupted Collantes, forcing her to rise from her suppliant posture. "It is useless to bandy farther words on a point respecting which I am fully decided. You cannot go hence: it is impossible!"

"At least suffer me to write to my sister!" exclaimed the wretched Juliana.

"No good purpose, my dear wife," responded the bandit, "can possibly be answered thereby. Doubtless the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle will read in the newspaper that the celebrated Ramon de Collantes had for some time past been living under a disguised name in a French village of the Eastern Pyrenees—and that when the *gendarmes* went to capture him, he effected his escape in a characteristic manner. The same journalists will not fail to record how his wife played the heroine in the most admirable manner; and thus the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle are sure to hear all that has taken place. There is no necessity to write and tell them exactly where you are: and moreover, for certain obvious reasons, it might be inconvenient."

At this moment one of the females entered the apartment, to inform Ramon de Collantes that he was wanted below. She then retired; and the bandit-captain said to Juliana, "Do your best to keep up your spirits and make yourself comfortable. I will presently despatch one of the women to Barcelona; and she shall purchase you all kinds of necessaries that you may require. You can give her a list,—and we will also do something to render the rooms more suitable for your accommodation. The amount of freedom you will enjoy, depends entirely on your conduct towards me: but I warn you against any attempt at escape. It is painful for me thus to speak—but methinks it is necessary."

Don Ramon de Collantes thereupon quitted the room, leaving Juliana a prey to reflections which may be more easily imagined than described. On descending to the ground-floor of the tower, the bandit-captain found that half-a-dozen of his men had just brought in, as prisoners, an English gentleman and his valet,—certain circumstances having led the outlaws to believe that a goodly ransom might be obtained for the liberation of the captives in this instance. It appeared that the gentleman and his valet were travelling post towards Madrid, having entered Spain by way of Figueras—that the detachment of banditti stopped the equipage—and that after desperate but ineffectual attempts at resistance, the traveller and his domestic were overpowered. There was no considerable sum of ready-money found upon the gentleman's person—no more than he might have deemed sufficient for his expenses to the Spanish capital: but, on the other hand, he had in his pocket-book letters of credit on a banker in that city for a very large amount. It was this fact which—in pursuance of their usual policy in such cases—had induced the banditti to bring the traveller and his valet as captives to the tower. The post-chaise had been left to return to Figueras,—the banditti however allowing the gentleman to pay the postilions their due—a course which they invariably adopted, and which led to the very natural supposition that there might be some little private understanding between the outlaws and the drivers in those districts.

The gentleman was about six or seven-and-twenty years of age—tall—well made—and handsome,—with a frank ingenuous expression of countenance. His hair was of a rich brown, curling naturally: his eyes were blue: his features were somewhat delicate, and classically modelled. Altogether, his appearance was most agreeable: his voice was rich and harmonious; and his manners were polished and elegant. But now he wore a haughty and indignant look: he betrayed not the slightest sentiment of fear: indeed, his courage had been well proven in his resistance to the banditti; and it was fortunate for him that in being overpowered at last, he had sustained no hurt more serious than a few bruises. His valet, also an Englishman, was a middle-aged, sedate-looking person—but one who could no doubt display a courageous resolution in the moment of emergency.

Ramon de Collantes addressed the English gentleman in the Spanish tongue first: but finding that it was little understood by the traveller, he proceeded to speak in French. In this language the captive was proficient; and the discourse therefore flowed on easily. The brigand-chief assured Mr. Forester,—for such the gentleman's name appeared to be, according to his passport and letters of credit,—that he need be under no apprehension in respect to his life, nor of ill-treatment, provided he would consent to purchase his liberty; and that during the interval which must elapse ere the ransom-money could be obtained from Madrid, he should experience as much attention and as good accommodation as under circumstances might be afforded. Mr. Forester,—whom the reader will recollect as having been William Deveril's second in the duel with Lord Harold Staunton,—saw no alternative but to accept the proposition. He found himself a prisoner in the midst of a wild region—at the mercy of a lawless band; and he was compelled to subdue his pride for his own personal convenience.

It is true that he was only travelling for his pleasure, being of no profession and possessing a handsome independent income: but still, though his time was so completely his own, it appeared to him by no means agreeable to pass more of it than was absolutely necessary in the quarters of a bandit horde. He therefore, though not without reluctance, consented to the terms laid down by Ramon de Collantes.

But now arose some little difficulty. This was not a mere matter of presenting a cheque at a banker's in any city or town more or less remote, and which could be accomplished by any one of the men suitably apparelled in a simple citizen's garb for the purpose: but it was to obtain cash on a letter of credit which by rights should be presented at the Madrid banker's by the individual in whose favour it was drawn. It was therefore a proceeding that required tact and management; and Ramon de Collantes saw no alternative but to undertake the business himself. At the first thought he did not much relish the idea of leaving his wife, whom he really loved, alone for ten days or a fortnight at the tower, during the very first period of her residence there, and when her impatient spirit ought to be checked by all his power of control. But his second reflection was of quite the opposite character; and he reasoned that it would perhaps be all the better to leave her thus for a short space to the monotonous kind of existence she would have to lead, so that on his return his presence would be welcomed by her as a cheering relief. Therefore Ramon de Collantes decided upon proceeding in person to Madrid, to obtain the ransom-money.

He represented to Mr. Forester that it was absolutely necessary he should write some credentials which would sufficiently account to the Madrid banker for the letter of credit being presented by another person instead of the individual in whose favour it was drawn. To this proposition Forester assented without much difficulty: for he himself saw that it was absolutely necessary, and he was too anxious to recover his freedom to throw any obstacle in the way. He accordingly wrote as if from Figueras, stating that he had been suddenly taken ill there—that his funds were exhausted—and that inasmuch as his friend Senor Escosura (the name assumed by Ramon de Collantes for his intended journey) was about to visit Madrid, he had entrusted him with the mission of obtaining a supply of ready cash.

When thus possessed of the necessary documents, Ramon de Collantes ascended to the chamber where he had left his wife; and informed her that circumstances compelled him to undertake an immediate journey, on which he might be some days absent. Juliana instantaneously perceived that this occurrence might probably furnish her, if she played her game well, with an opportunity of escape: but in order to obtain this opportunity, it was necessary she should have as much freedom as possible—to which end it was equally requisite to throw her husband off his guard. She therefore at once simulated grief and alarm at the thought of separation. She begged him to forgive her for the first feelings of aversion which she had exhibited towards her new home,—representing to him that he must make all allowances under the circumstances in which she was placed—but vowing that she was not the less interested in his safety. In short, she enacted her part so well as to lull her husband to a certain degree into security on her account: but he nevertheless resolved that until his return she should be continuously watched and have as little liberty as possible. He bade her farewell; and she still kept up her dissimulation by much weeping and sobbing. Previous to his departure, he gave the strictest injunctions to the members of the band as to the precise amount of freedom which his wife and the two prisoners (Mr. Forester and his valet) were respectively to be allowed;—having done which, he set out on his journey.

One of the females appointed to attend upon Juliana, spoke French fluently; and from her lips the brigand-captain's wife accordingly understood that she would be permitted to take exercise within a circuit of a mile of the tower; and a similar communication was made to the prisoners. Juliana learnt from the same source, of the presence of those prisoners at the tower; and on hearing that they were fellow-countrymen, she was suddenly inspired by the secret hope that if she were enabled to communicate with them, they would aid in her escape. She did not however think it prudent to precipitate the means which might be adopted as a test to ascertain whether she should be enabled to communicate with them or not: she therefore remained in her own chamber throughout the whole of that first day of her sojourn at the tower. In the evening the valet who had been left behind at the cottage in the French village, made his appearance at the robbers' stronghold; and Juliana learnt that her own maid—whom she had originally engaged in Paris—had declined to accompany the valet to rejoin her mistress, now that she knew that her master, instead of being the Count de Toledo, was a famous brigand-chief. We should likewise add that Juliana despatched, according to her husband's instructions, one of the women to Barcelona, to make such purchases as were requisite; and in the meantime she managed as well as she was able with all such necessaries for the toilet as the females, whose wardrobes were by no means badly supplied, were enabled to furnish.

On the following day Juliana availed herself of her privilege to walk in the neighbourhood of the tower: and presently she beheld a gentleman whom she at once concluded to be the English prisoner, roaming about likewise. It was beyond the limits of the grove of cork-trees that she thus descried him: but as her looks swept around with a wider range, she noticed six or seven of the banditti posted on eminences at certain intervals, so as to engirdle, as it were with a *cordon* of sentinels, the precincts of the tower. These men seemed to be lounging idly about, as if intent on no particular object: but their carbines were slung over their shoulders—their swords were by their sides—and the sunbeams glinted upon the pistols and the poniard-handles in their belts. Therefore Juliana knew full well why those men were thus dispersed around; and the hope of escape diminished somewhat in her bosom.

Mr. Forester—having maintained the haughtiest reserve towards all the members of the band, both male and female,—had not exchanged any unnecessary word with even those who could speak

French; and therefore he had not learnt that there was an English lady at the tower, and that she was the chieftain's wife. He was consequently surprised when he beheld a female apparelled in a garb totally different from that of the other women whom he had as yet seen, and which belonged to the fashions suited for the meridian of Paris or of London. At first he took her to be a Spaniard: for such an impression might well be conveyed by Juliana's appearance, —her hair being of raven darkness, her eyes black and full of fire, and her complexion a delicate olive. He thought of turning aside and passing in another direction,—believing her to be a member of the band: when it struck him that, like himself, she might possibly be a captive. He therefore continued to advance; and **the nearer he drew, the more forcibly did it occur to him that she could scarcely be a native of Spain—but that her splendid beauty and gorgeously developed form, together with her mien and carriage so statuesque and lady-like, denoted her as a countrywoman of his own.**

"Then she must be a prisoner!" he thought: and taking off his hat, he made her a courteous salutation.

"Now," said Juliana to herself, "for the test whether or not I am allowed to speak to this English gentleman!"

Her eyes were swept rapidly around as she also advanced: there was no unusual movement amongst the sentries posted at intervals about—no one hurried forth from the tower to forbid this meeting: and with joy as well as with rekindling hope in her heart, she accosted the captive.

"You are a prisoner, if I mistake not?" she said in her most affable manner, but at the same time with a look of commiseration and mournfulness.

"Yes, madam—such is my fate for the present," responded Mr. Forester, perfectly dazzled by the beauty which, diminishing not on a nearer view, characterised the lady. "And you?"

"Alas, a prisoner likewise!" returned Juliana, with a profound sigh. "But what is worse," she went on hurriedly to observe, anxious to get over the requisite explanations, which were as painful as they were unavoidable, with all possible despatch,—"I am the victim of the foulest treachery——But how can I confess it? And yet the tale must be told!—I am the captain's wife."

Mr. Forester staggered with a wild amazement. Was it possible that this lady whose manners had evidently been formed in the most polished circles, and whose splendid beauty was fit to embellish the gilded saloons of fashion, instead of being buried in the midst of Catalonia's wastes,—was it possible that she was the consort of Ramon de Collantes?

"Ah, sir!" cried Juliana, "you may well be smitten with astonishment: but the tale I have told you is only too true. The particulars—humiliating enough for me—can be concisely summed up. I was residing in France—I was thrown in the way of one who bore the name of the Count de Toledo—and whom I beheld living like a nobleman of wealth amongst the gayest circles of Paris. He offered me his hand—he was accepted—and we were married. This was eight or nine months ago——"

"And for nine months you have been in this man's power?" ejaculated Forester, with an astonishment but little abating.

"It was but yesterday that I knew everything," replied Juliana. "Yesterday morning was I brought hither, under the impression that I was coming to take up my abode in a splendid mansion situated in the midst of a vast domain; and you may conceive, sir, the horror and anguish of my feelings, when my husband, suddenly throwing off the mask—which indeed he could no longer wear—proclaimed himself Ramon de Collantes!"

"Good heavens, lady!" cried Mr. Forester, his handsome countenance colouring with indignation, and all his heart's sympathies at once enlisted in Juliana's favour: "what diabolic treachery! But pardon me—I forgot at the moment I was speaking of your husband."

"You would be justified in entertaining a very evil opinion of me indeed," quickly rejoined Juliana, "if you fancied that I could still experience the feelings of a wife towards that man. No, sir—I hate and detest the villain who has deceived me. Husband indeed! Never can I think of him as such again: nor would the law hold me bound by ties contracted under circumstances so frightfully perfidious."

"You are right, madam," answered Forester, his sympathies deepening on her behalf when he found her taking what he considered to be so proper a view of her position. "You will not deem it idle flattery if I express my belief—from your appearance, your manners, and your discourse—that you have been accustomed to move in a sphere very different from that in which you now find yourself?"

"I have indeed!" rejoined Juliana mournfully: and then she reflected for a few instants whether she should tell the English gentleman who she really was.

She feared the possibility, if not the probability, of his having heard of that dreadful exposure which took place at Saxondale Castle, and which had been rapidly circulated at the time throughout the fashionable world of England. But, on the other hand, there was the chance that the incident had never reached his ears at all; and if she were to stop short here—giving no further explanations relative to herself, and naming not the family to which she belonged—he might naturally look with suspicion upon all the rest of her tale, and would be justified in supposing that she was playing some hypocritical part.

"Yes," she went on to observe, her mind being promptly made up to the alternative of frankness at any risk; "I did indeed move in a different sphere. Perhaps the name of Saxondale is not unfamiliar to you?"

"Unfamiliar!" cried Forester, with renewed amazement. "It is that of an English nobleman——"

"Whose sister I am," added Juliana. "Once the Hon. Miss Farefield——now a bandit's wife!"

"Good heavens! and you were Miss Farefield?" exclaimed Forester. "But you are Miss Farefield still: for, as you ere now rightly observed, the law cannot possibly sanction a marriage into which you were so treacherously inveigled. Madam," he continued, in a hurried tone—for he was much excited on Juliana's behalf—her dazzling beauty too having produced no trifling effect upon him,—"if I can be of any assistance to you, command my services. In a few days I myself shall be free; and I vow before heaven to devote my liberty to the duty of effecting your's!"

Juliana warmly expressed her acknowledgments for this assurance; and a weight was lifted from her mind—for she felt convinced, by Mr. Forester's looks, words, and manner, that he was acquainted with nothing prejudicial to her character. This indeed was the fact: for immediately after the duel, Forester had gone abroad, and had remained many months on the Continent ere returning to England. When he did revisit the British metropolis, the scandal attaching itself in divers ways to the name of Saxondale, was past and gone—or at least was lost sight of in the contemplation of fresh incidents occurring in the fashionable world. Then, too, his stay in London had been very short: and though he saw Deveril, yet our hero had in the meantime learnt that Lady Saxondale was his mother, and he would not therefore breathe a syllable against her. Mr. Forester returned to

the Continent, where he had since been residing or travelling. He therefore knew absolutely nothing prejudicial to the character of Juliana,—however poor his opinion might be of her mother in consequence of the revelations made to him by Deveril at the time of the duel.

"You have promised to befriend me," said Juliana; "and heaven knows how much I stand in need of such friendship! To whom am I indebted for this generous offer?"

"My name is Forester," was the English gentleman's response: "and being entirely my own master, I can have no difficulty in fulfilling the pledge I have given you. My time is my own; and my pecuniary means are ample."

That name of Forester at once struck Juliana as not being altogether unknown to her, though she never remembered to have seen this gentleman before. Suddenly she recollected the name in connexion with the duel between Deveril and Staunton: but still, as it was by no means an uncommon one, it did not follow that this should be the identical individual who acted as second on that occasion.

"I see," he observed with a partial smile, "that my name has struck you somewhat. But it is no reason that I should refuse to devote my services to the daughter, because at one time I befriended a gentleman who sustained some injury from the mother."

"I understand the allusion, Mr. Forester," said Juliana; "and I thank you for the delicacy of the terms in which it is couched:"—at the same time she was still assured that he knew nothing to her own prejudice. "It will not be well for us to be seen too much together. Behold you those sentinels placed all around? They are as much to keep watch upon me as upon yourself; and as the first thought of captives is always how to escape, these vile outlaws may possibly suspect that our discourse has a tendency in that direction. We shall have opportunities of meeting again: but you will not be offended if in the presence of witnesses I treat you with coldness and reserve."

"Prudence dictates that course, Miss Farefield—for by that name shall I call you:" and Forester, again lifting his hat, pursued his way in one direction, while Juliana moved off in another.

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

MR. FORESTER.

Several days passed, during which Juliana and Mr. Forester frequently met; and as not the slightest notice was taken of their proceedings—or, at least, as no syllable of remonstrance against these encounters was spoken to either—they felt assured that Ramon de Collantes, ere taking his departure, had left no instructions to prevent the civilities of such intercourse between them. They therefore prolonged their walks in each other's society—not merely to discuss plans for an escape, but likewise because they felt more and more pleasure in being together. We have already said that Juliana's beauty had produced an immediate effect upon Mr. Forester; and she could not help contrasting his handsome person and elegant manners with the coarser attributes of her husband. Besides, the circumstances under which they thus met, were tinged with a romance full well calculated to draw them thus towards each other.

But why did they discuss plans for an immediate escape, if such were practicable? why did they not wait until the return of Collantes should restore Forester to liberty, and thus leave him free to take whatsoever means circumstances should suggest for the liberation of Juliana? It was because she feared that when once her husband came back, she would be too completely in the thraldom of his vigilance to enable any one from a distance to ensure her flight: she trembled at the idea of being left behind by this friend whom accident had thrown in her way; and moreover, as above stated, she already experienced a tender feeling in his behalf. On his side, he was equally sensible of those difficulties, just enumerated, which would have to be encountered in liberating Juliana: he was smitten with her beauty; and he would gladly acquire a claim upon her by the performance of some chivalrous exploit, or the carrying out of some well-laid stratagem, in order to deliver her from the power of her bandit-husband.

"The time is passing," said Juliana, one forenoon about eight or nine days after her arrival at the tower; "and as yet nothing is decided. He may return sooner than we anticipate——"

"The time has passed so agreeably in one sense," observed Forester,—"and indeed I am now in no hurry for the return of Collantes——"

"But if he should return speedily," urged Juliana, bending upon her companion a tender look—for she comprehended full well the meaning of his words; "what will become of me? Oh! what shall I do if you were to leave me here alone? I should feel as if abandoned by my only friend!"

"Miss Farefield," responded Forester, earnestly, "I swear to you that I am incapable of abandoning you by my own free will. Come—let us seriously, and if possible for the last time, deliberate upon some plan of flight."

"Alas!" said Juliana, "I see not how it is to be effected. Sentinels watch at the entrance of the tower by night; and in the day-time it would be utter madness to attempt escape."

"I know not that it would be such utter madness," observed Forester, as an idea gradually developed itself in his mind. "If I thought that you were able to gallop a steed fearlessly——"

"Oh, indeed I am!" ejaculated Juliana, as the remembrance of her rapid flight from the cottage in company with her husband, came back to her mind. But what plan has suggested itself?"

"Supposing that we had two steeds ready saddled," said Mr. Forester, "and that watching an opportunity, we sprang upon their backs and committed ourselves to chance? There would be this risk probably—that bullets would whistle about our ears. For myself, I care not——And perhaps those sentinels posted around, would hesitate to fire at their chieftain's wife——Pardon me for reminding you of your position."

"They would fire—rest assured that they would fire!" rejoined Juliana. "Wherefore are they posted on those heights?"

"To fire upon me or my domestic, if we at-

tempted to escape—but surely not to level their deadly weapons against you!"

"And even if we agreed to run that risk," said Juliana,—"what plan have you settled in your mind as to the horses?"

"This morning, ere I joined you," replied Mr. Forester, "I passed by the stable: the door was open—and I strolled in. I had no definite motive for so doing: it was merely to see the animals. No one was there at the moment: the saddles and bridles were ready at hand—if I had chosen, I could even then have self-appropriated one of the steeds. There is a lady's saddle—I noticed it——"

"It is mine!" ejaculated Juliana; and as a wild thrill of hope shot through her heart, she added, "Would to heaven that I were seated in it now! Cheerfully would I risk the volleys that might be poured down by the fire-arms of the banditti!"

"Then, if you have the courage to dare the venture," exclaimed Forester, gazing with admiration upon the lady, "let our plan be thus settled. But we must fly alone together: I must abandon my domestic to the mercy of these fellows. Ah! an idea has struck me. The letter of credit upon the Madrid banker is for fifteen hundred pounds; and I have given Ramon de Collantes authority to receive eight hundred. I will leave behind me a note to the effect that if he suffers my domestic to depart in safety, he may receive the remainder of the amount as a ransom; and I will likewise pen a proper authority to that effect."

"What generous sacrifices you are making on my behalf!" said Juliana, with another tender look at her companion.

"Were they ten thousand times greater, they should be cheerfully made," responded Forester, who doubtless anticipated that the lady would not fail to display her gratitude to any extent which he might be bold enough to solicit.

"And the risk that you will run?" added Juliana.

"I can dare death in the hope of enjoying life in your society," was her companion's rejoinder.

She bent down her looks, and appeared for a few moments to be overwhelmed with confusion: for it was impossible to mistake the significancy of that avowal.

"And when," she asked, lifting her eyes again, "shall we put the project into execution?"

"It is impossible to fix a moment," he answered: "we must trust to the chapter of accidents. Fortunately the door of the stable is not within view of the entrance to the tower; and therefore whosoever may be lounging about in front of the edifice, would not have any cause to suspect what was being done in the stable. To-morrow morning, shortly after the breakfast hour, I will stroll forth. You can be nigh at hand. It were well perhaps that you should come without your bonnet: it will have the appearance as if you merely meant to imbibe a little fresh air, without even walking beyond the precincts of the wood. I will watch the opportunity to beckon you into the stable. If fortune favour us, all may be done in a few instants; and if we be discovered—if our plan be defeated—we can only anticipate the total privation of liberty until the return of Collantes."

"Be it all as you say," replied Juliana; "and in order that there shall be no cause for suspicion, let us to-day remain as little together as possible."

"Prudence compels me to submit," rejoined Forester: "but my own inclinations prompt the reverse."

Juliana flung upon her companion another tender look; and they separated,—he rambling in one direction, and she re-entering the tower. For the rest of that day her heart was in an almost incessant flutter, with mingled apprehension and hope. How she longed to quit that gloomy half-dilapidated tower!—and what pleasure, too, to have the handsome and agreeable Forester as the companion of her flight! She felt assured that he would not be content with merely placing her in security: he would not abandon her when having rescued her from the power of the banditti. His looks and his words had alike told her that he anticipated a recompense for the tremendous risk he was about to run on her behalf. Yes—and it was by no means likely he would sue in vain at the feet of one whose temperament was so sensuous and luxurious as that of Juliana.

The hours passed—the evening came—and she retired to rest: but sleep did not soon visit her eyes. She lay revolving in her mind all the details of the plan laid down for their flight: she could not shut out from her conviction that it was fraught with danger—that it amounted almost to the actual madness of desperation: but in its very boldness existed the hope of success. At all events, it was worth while to run the risk: she would sooner perish by one of the winged balls from a carbine, than linger out her existence in that dreadful place;—and even if she were captured and brought back, her position could scarcely be rendered much worse than it already was. Therefore her fortitude failed not; and even while envisaging all the perils to be incurred and the consequences of failure, she never for a moment hesitated in the adoption of the project.

On his side, Mr. Forester was equally resolute. He had become deeply enamoured of Juliana: her magnificent beauty had produced a strong impression on his heart; and he felt assured that he would not be compelled to sigh vainly at her feet, if fortunate enough to prove her deliverer. He was naturally of a brave and chivalrous disposition; and if the romantic circumstances in which he had encountered Juliana had exercised its influence over his feelings and sympathies, there was likewise something stirring and exciting, bold and dashing, in the feat which had to be performed to crown his triumph. Not for a moment, therefore, did he shrink from the enterprise; and he was even sanguine of success.

He rose in the morning earlier than usual; and tearing out some leaves from his pocket-book, penned the documents of which he had spoken to Juliana, and which he purposed to leave behind him. He had no better writing-paper: he dared not ask for any; and as he knew full well that the Madrid banker would not be satisfied with a mere scrap written upon with a pencil, he assured Collantes in the note addressed to him, that he would from the first town write by post to the banker,—pledging his honour as a gentleman that it should not be with any hostile purpose. Besides, his valet

would remain in the hands of the banditti as a hostage for the faithful performance of the compact thus volunteered; and all things considered, Forester felt that he could not possibly manage the proceeding better. His object of course was to ensure the safe egress of his domestic from the tower; and the means he was taking appeared to be all-sufficient for the purpose. To his valet he did not however breathe a word of his intentions: the man would not like the idea of being left behind; and on the other hand, as it was perilous enough for two persons to attempt an escape, it would be still more against the chances of success if three were to embark upon the enterprise.

Having partaken of the breakfast, which in due course was brought up to his apartment, Mr. Forester—securing about his person the papers which he had written—descended the staircase, and sauntered forth from the tower in a leisurely manner. A couple of the banditti were seated on a bench in front, eating their morning meal; and according to his usual habit, he passed them by without taking the slightest notice of them. They exchanged observations in their own native tongue, to the effect that "the Englishman need not be so haughtily proud;" and went on devouring their rations. After making a slight circuit, Forester approached the stable; and at the same instant he saw Juliana at a little distance. She had followed his advice, by descending from her chamber without her bonnet: she walked about for a little while in front of the tower; and then, as if quite in an abstracted mood, passed round to the side.

Forester had flung his looks hastily into the stable, and felt satisfied that no one was there. He beckoned to Juliana, who at once followed him into the place. Quick as thought he took down her side-saddle from the peg on which it was placed: but at the same instant a sudden noise was heard at the farther extremity of the stable; and a bandit, who had hitherto been concealed by a pile of hay against which he was seated while discussing his morning meal, emerged to their view. The fellow instantaneously suspected Forester's designs; and drawing his poniard, flew towards him.

A shriek rose up to Juliana's lips, as she thought that all was lost: but fortunately she suppressed it—for Forester, with lightning swiftness, encountered the bandit—warded off with his arm the blow which was aimed at him with the poniard—hurled the man to the ground—and placed a hand over his mouth and a knee upon his chest.

"Quick! your kerchief!" he said to Juliana. "Take the poniard"—which had fallen from the brigand's hand—"hold it over him! plunge it into his heart if he dare utter a word!"

Juliana was in a moment all life and activity. She gave Forester her kerchief—snatched up the poniard—and held the point so close to the brigand's chest that he felt it penetrating through his garment. In the twinkling of an eye the kerchief was thrust into his mouth: he was thus completely gagged.

"Cords—halters—anything to bind him!" said Forester quickly, as he now snatched the dagger from the hand of Juliana; and while he still kept the villain down with his knee upon his breast, he held the poniard over him—at the same time showing by his looks that he was resolved to use it if the slightest resistance were attempted.

His proceedings were ably and expeditiously seconded by Juliana. Two or three halters were ready close by; and with these she bound the prostrate bandit hand and foot—while Forester held the menacing poniard but an inch above his countenance. Half suffocated with the kerchief, and full of mingled rage and terror, the man presented a hideous spectacle with his convulsing features. The work was promptly done: helpless and speechless the brigand lay upon the ground; and scarcely two minutes had elapsed since the moment that Forester and Juliana entered the stable.

Now to saddle and bridle two of the steeds! Juliana's own horse was amongst them; and the quick eye of Forester showed him which was likely to be the strongest and fleetest of the rest. The process of caparisoning the two animals was speedily accomplished; and then came the most daring and difficult part of the whole transaction. Fortunately the door was just high enough for a person on horseback to pass forth by bowing the head down upon the animal's neck. This Forester's keen glance perceived in an instant; and he assisted Juliana into her saddle. Then he tossed down by the bandit's side the papers which he had written—mounted the animal which he had saddled for himself—and bade Juliana follow him close.

Stooping down so as to avoid the top of the doorway, they urged their horses forth; and with the speed of the wind they galloped down the sloping path through the vista of cork-trees. Ejaculations of rage and astonishment from the sentinels at the entrance, reached their ears, as they thus careered past like lightning-flashes: those ejaculations were quickly followed by shots—and a bullet went through Forester's hat, while another whistled close by Juliana's ear.

"Courage, my heroine!" shouted Forester: and the grove echoed the cry.

In a couple of minutes they emerged from amidst the trees; and in an instant shots were fired by the sentinels posted at a little distance in that part of the precincts of the tower.

"Courage!" again shouted Forester, as a glance showed him that Juliana was unhurt; and he felt that he himself was.

"Fear not for me, my brave deliverer!" cried Juliana; and her companion saw that she was quite equal to the enterprise.

Several more shots whistled past them, but without taking any effect. Then the sentinels who were nearest ahead were seen rushing down from the heights where they had been posted, like madmen to intercept the progress of the fugitives—but all in vain. Crack! crack! again went the carbines: still were Forester and Juliana untouched: their coursers sped like the wind—and in a few minutes they felt themselves in comparative safety. But still they relaxed not their speed: they knew full well there would be a chase; and it was not their purpose to throw away a single one of the many chances that were now in favour of their ultimate escape. Presently Forester, on looking back, perceived three or four horsemen dashing down an eminence: they were the banditti in pursuit—but he had little doubt of distancing them. On, on sped the fugitives,—encouraging ejaculations constantly flying from Forester's lips, as the sparks from the flints beneath the horses' hoofs.

In about half-an-hour the fugitives looked vainly around for their pursuers; and they were now enabled to breathe their steeds for a few moments. But only for a few moments—and then their course was continued at the same whirlwind swiftness as before. Another half-hour, and they drew in the reins again. Many miles of ground had now been passed over: the countenance of each was suffused with a crimson glow. How splendidly beautiful seemed Juliana in the eyes of Forester! how handsome did he appear to the view of the lady!

It was while they were thus walking their horses for the few moments they allowed themselves as breathing-time, that the quick trampling of a steed coming from a-head, reached their ears; and a turning in the wild unbeaten way which they were pursuing, suddenly brought them full in the presence of Ramon de Collantes. A terrific ejaculation of rage burst from the lips of the robber-chief, as he in a moment recognised his wife and Forester. The Englishman would not have hesitated to stop and dare a conflict with the brigand: but Juliana, with a cry of alarm, urged her steed into all the swiftness of which it was capable—so that Forester was compelled to keep pace with her; and thus sweeping past Collantes with the speed of a vanishing dream, they were beyond his view in a moment.

So astounded was he at what he had thus seen, that he remained motionless for a few instants where he had suddenly reined in his horse: then, with another ejaculation of fury, he wheeled the animal round and dashed in pursuit. Forester and Juliana both expected that he would adopt this course; and the former exclaimed, "If it come to a death-struggle, my fair companion, you shall only fall back into the bandit captain's power when I shall be no more alive to defend you!"

Juliana was far from anxious that such a scene should take place; and she therefore compelled her courser to dash on in its wild career. They now entered upon a beaten road,—but neither having the slightest idea in which direction it led. They looked back: Ramon de Collantes was still in pursuit—he was about two hundred yards behind.

"Courage!" ejaculated Forester: and this was the cry he had been continuously sending forth, for he feared lest Juliana's strength and spirit should suddenly give way.

But as she still held gallantly on, in her precipitate flight, that apprehension wore off; and he experienced an exultant admiration for the heroism which she thus displayed. The luxuriant masses of her raven hair floated all dishevelled upon the gushing wind which was excited by their rapid progress through the air: the richest glow was upon her cheeks—fire burnt in her eyes—her lips, apart, afforded glimpses of her brilliant teeth—and she sat like an Amason upon the steed which bore her along.

Collantes was evidently gaining ground; and all of a sudden a pistol-bullet whistled past Forester's ear.

"Good heavens!" cried Juliana; "he has fire-arms!"—and for an instant a dizziness came over her.

"Courage!" again shouted Forester. "Look! look!" he instantaneously added: "we are saved! You are beyond danger! Look! look!"

And as his beautiful companion quickly turned her eyes in the direction to which he pointed, she beheld a squadron of cavalry descending an eminence. In a few minutes the soldiers, who at the spectacle of that chase put spurs to their chargers, were close upon the roadside:—Forester and Juliana drew in their reins—they were now in the midst of protectors.

"Ramon de Collantes!" ejaculated Forester, pointing in the direction where the bandit-chief had a few instants back been pursuing them.

"Ramon de Collantes!" echoed every voice in the troop; and in a moment there was a headlong gallop in pursuit of the formidable brigand.

He had likewise caught sight of the soldiery: his steed was wheeled round in a moment—and he was in full retreat. But his horse was wearied by the chase after the fugitives; and in a short time he was overtaken. Like a lion at bay, he turned and faced his twenty opponents. A pistol was discharged at the foremost; and at the very instant the soldier, reeling back in his saddle with a mortal wound, was about to fall from his horse, Ramon de Collantes clutched at the sword which was dropping from his grasp. Then, with all the mad fury of desperation, did he strike right and left—ghastly wounds were inflicted—but it was only for a few instants that he thus was enabled valiantly to defend himself. A pistol bullet pierced his brain, stretching him lifeless in the road.

Some of the soldiers, who were about thirty in all, had remained to protect Forester and Juliana: for in the first instance they knew not how many persons might be in chase of them. One of the military spoke French; and thus, in a few rapidly uttered words from both the fugitives, he was given to understand that they had just escaped from the brigand's tower: but, as the reader may suppose, neither Forester nor Juliana let drop a syllable to betray the unpleasant fact that she was Ramon de Collantes' wife. It appeared from what the soldier said, it was well known to the civil and military authorities of Catalonia that the brigands had been wont to harbour in the dilapidated tower: but on the occasions when a military force had been sent into the neighbourhood, it was invariably assailed from the heights, and such murderous havoc was committed by the rifles of the banditti, as to compel a retreat. Now, however, that the dreaded chief himself was no more, the squadron seemed resolved to proceed to the tower—and, if possible, extirpate the band.

The person of the slain Collantes was searched: but very little coin was found about him—not more than a sum equivalent to ten or twelve pounds of English money. It therefore appeared tolerably evident that he had not been enabled to receive the ransom-money at Madrid; and this suspicion was speedily confirmed when the letter of credit, on being discovered amongst his papers, was found to have no endorsement, nor notification of any payment being made on account. As a matter of course this document was at once handed over to Mr. Forester,—who, we should add, forgot not to mention the circumstance of his valet being still a captive at the tower. He expressed his intention of proceeding to Barcelona, whither he desired that his domestic might be instructed to follow.

The soldiers departed in one direction—Forester

and Juliana in another. It cannot be supposed that the lady was very seriously afflicted by the death of her husband: on the contrary, she was rejoiced at a tragedy which so effectually severed the hated connexion. As she rode along by the side of her companion, she reflected on the course which it would be prudent for her to pursue towards him. Should she endeavour to ensnare him into matrimony? or should she consent to become his mistress? She knew full well that this latter alternative was open to her acceptance: but the accomplishment of the former was by no means so easy. She had seen enough of Forester to know that he was a thorough man of the world; and it was by no means likely that he would take as his wife the widow of a bandit, notwithstanding her really high connexions, and the treachery by which she had been inveigled into that alliance. Besides, some little time would have to elapse before he could possibly become so thoroughly infatuated as to propose matrimony; and in the interval he might learn things to her prejudice. The idea of seeking for marriage with Forester, was therefore abandoned; and Juliana made up her mind to an amour with her handsome companion.

But it must be added that she now longed to return to England. Her experiences of Continental life had been none of the most pleasant: she did not wish to settle in Spain—it was impossible for her to return to Paris, where it was known through the newspapers that her late husband, the false Count de Toledo, was none other than the celebrated Spanish bandit Ramon de Collantes—and she therefore came to the conclusion that if it were necessary for her to lead either a life of retirement, cut out from all society, or to live openly with a protector as his mistress, it might just as well be in England as elsewhere. The feelings of shame which had at first rendered her so averse to return to her native country at the same time with her mother, and which had so long kept her abroad,—were by this time crushed out of her by the various circumstances through which she had passed; and she had ceased to dread a revisit to the clime of her birth. Besides, it was now close upon the period when Edmund would be of age; and knowing the tremendous secret in respect to his birth,—a secret which she had wormed out of Madge Somers on the midnight visit which she paid to her cottage, as the reader will remember,—she was curious to ascertain whether he would be suffered to take possession of the estates without the slightest whisper of the real truth, and without opposition from any quarter. Of course, Juliana was utterly ignorant that the rightful heir—her own real and actual brother—was in existence: she was not therefore aware that there could be any opposition to Edmund's complete succession;—but, as above stated, she still felt curious and interested upon the point.

The result of her reflections, as she rode by Forester's side, was two-fold:—first, that she would abandon herself to an amour which, whether destined to prove transient or permanent, would necessarily depend upon circumstances—and secondly, that she would return to England.

Forester did not for some time interrupt Juliana's meditations, though he was very far from penetrating into their true nature. He thought that she might possibly experience a certain shock—if not actual *grief*—at the sudden and violent death of a man who, no matter what his character and calling were, had nevertheless been her husband. But after a while, Forester broke the silence which had followed their separation from the band of soldiers; and he said, "You are thinking, my fair heroine, of the catastrophe which has taken place?"

"And at which it were a wretched affectation on my part," she rejoined, "to say that I am afflicted."

"You speak in a proper spirit," observed Forester: "it is impossible to deplore the death of the traitor who deceived you. But meseems that we should do well to converse upon our plans. I said ere now that I should proceed to Barcelona—a resolve to which I came without consulting you, for the simple reason that I am penniless. All the ready money I had about me at the time of my capture by the brigands, passed into their hands. At Barcelona I can stop at some hotel, while I write to Madrid and procure supplies."

"Fortunately," responded Juliana, "I have some little money in my purse, which will bear our expenses on the road to Barcelona: for you see," she added with downcast eyes, "I am compelled to force myself on your companionship until we reach that city."

"Thanks for this assurance!" exclaimed Forester: and then he observed in a soft voice and a tender manner, "Wherefore should this companionship, so sweet for me, terminate at Barcelona?"

"Wherefore?" ejaculated Juliana, affecting to regard him with a look of extreme surprise. "Because it is my intention to return to England with as little delay as possible."

"And I also shall return to England," replied Forester, though the instant before he had not even thought of such a proceeding—much less made up his mind to it. "Will you permit me to escort you back to our native land? Truly, my fair heroine,—for such familiar terms must you suffer me to adopt,—you have passed through too many perilous adventures to render it agreeable for you to travel alone. Ah! my dear Juliana!" he suddenly exclaimed, "can you not understand that you have inspired me with a passion which will not permit me to leave you voluntarily?"

Juliana gave no reply; she averted her looks, and appeared to be reflecting profoundly: but Forester felt persuaded that his meaning was understood, and that his fair companion would not prove a very difficult conquest.

We will not linger upon the details of this journey which they performed together. We must however observe that at the first town they reached, Juliana purchased a bonnet and a riding-habit: for the reader will recollect in what condition she had fled from the tower. It took them three days to reach the Catalan capital,—the intermediate nights being passed in towns where they halted. But Juliana did not immediately abandon herself to the arms of her companion: she did not choose him to think his conquest too cheap, or that her virtue was too facile. The farther however they advanced on the road, the more tender grew their discourse; and when Barcelona was in sight, they came to such an understanding together, that Forester was sufficiently encouraged to propose that she should pass as his wife at the hotel where they were about to take up their abode.

And now let us suppose them arrived there. Handsome apartments were at once obtained—a sumptuous repast was served up—and inspired by exhilarating champagne, the two travellers could now look back with smiles and triumph at the perils they had passed through and the fatigues they had endured. We may even go a little farther, and depict Forester on his knees at the feet of the handsome Juliana—his arms encircling her waist—his head resting upon her bosom—while she, with her fine dark eyes swimming in a voluptuous languor, looked down upon his truly handsome countenance. He forgot that she had been a bandit's wife: he beheld only in her a woman of grandly luxurious beauty—and he was rejoiced at the conquest he had achieved.

Mr. Forester failed not to write to the banker at Madrid, to whom he explained all the circumstances under which his letter of credit had been originally presented by Ramon de Collantes. In due course he received an answer, informing him that the genuine character of the transaction had been suspected—that there had seemed something strange in the very nature of the letter which it was pretended had been written from an hotel at Figueras—and that the person representing himself as Senor Escosura was required to bring forward credible witnesses to guarantee his respectability. This was a demand with which Ramon de Collantes had evidently found it somewhat inconvenient to comply—for he did not present himself a second time to the banker, who therefore saw that he had exercised a sound discretion. To be brief, this gentleman's communication farther informed Forester that the amount represented in the letter of credit was now duly remitted to a banker at Barcelona.

In the interval the valet arrived safe and sound from the tower. The intelligence he brought may be summed up in a few words. A few hours after the escape of his master and Juliana took place, an alarm was raised, to the effect that the military were approaching. From what the valet could judge, an immediate council of war was held by the banditti—the result being a determination to make a desperate stand: for if they were to take to flight, it was but too evident they would be pursued, and in that straggling form cut to pieces. As the squadron approached, it was received with vollies of musketry, poured forth from the windows of the tower: but the soldiers bore themselves bravely—stormed the building—and succeeded in capturing those of the band who were not slain in the onslaught. The prisoners thus taken, were despatched under a proper escort to Barcelona,—and the valet took advantage of the circumstance to accompany the military. As for the females of the band, they were generously suffered by the officer in command of the squadron, to go at large. It farther appeared that, immense quantities of wood being cut down and collected for the purpose, the tower was set on fire; and though the masonry was too solid for the work of ruin to be complete, the place was nevertheless reduced to a condition that would render it unfit to harbour any of the other brigand hordes which still infested Catalonia.

The prisoners who were sent to Barcelona, suffered in due time upon the scaffold: but long ere their execution took place, Forester and Juliana, attended by the valet, arrived in England. Juliana speedily ascertained that her mother and Edmund were still residing at Saxondale House in Park Lane; and she intimated to Forester her intention of passing at least a few days with them. He was quite well enough pleased with his conquest to wish to retain her as a mistress, though he had not the slightest idea of making her his wife. He therefore besought that she would not long remain absent from him; and he promised that during the interval, he would take some agreeable residence in the neighbourhood of London, whither to bear her after her visit to Saxondale House. On her own side, Juliana was equally well pleased with Mr. Forester; and she promised to grant his request. Under these circumstances they parted: and without any previous notification of her intended visit, Juliana one fine morning made her appearance in the presence of her mother and Edmund——we may likewise add of Lord Harold Staunton: for he, though not actually domiciled at Saxondale House, nevertheless passed the greater portion of his time there.

CHAPTER CLXIX.

LINKS IN THE CHAIN OF EVIDENCE.

We must now once more transport the reader into Lincolnshire. About sixteen months had elapsed since the circumstances of our story rivetted attention upon Saxondale Castle and its neighbourhood: we allude to the period when Adelaide met her death, in the waters of the Trent, at the hands of her own husband. Since that era neither the guilty young man nor Lady Saxondale had revisited the Castle; and the circumstance which had created so great a sensation at the time, had almost ceased to be spoken of by the dwellers in that district.

It was about the time of Juliana's return to Saxondale House in London, that the incidents we are about to record took place in Lincolnshire. One fine day—at the beginning of April, 1846—Mr. Hawkshaw was riding out on horseback, when he encountered his friend Mr. Denison, who was likewise taking equestrian exercise. They had not previously met for some weeks, inasmuch as the old gentleman had been on a visit to the Marquis of Eagledean at Edenbridge Park in Kent, and had only returned on the day previous to which we are writing.

"My dear friend," exclaimed Hawkshaw, when they had shaken hands and exchanged the usual compliments, "I was just thinking of you as I saw you turn the angle of the road. I was wondering when you purposed to come back. What tidings bring you from Edenbridge? All our friends well and happy, as when last I saw them some fifteen or sixteen months back?"

"Ah! that was on the occasion of the four bridals," observed Denison; "and you remember that I also was of the party. Yes, they are all well and happy: indeed I know not wherefore they should be otherwise. I have been paying a perfect round of visits; and I have letters for you, Hawkshaw, pressing you to do the same. My groom

has ridden over to the Hall with them; and so you will have them on your return."

"Were I not going to Gainsborough on a little business," responded the Squire, "I would hasten home for the pleasure of reading them. But you can tell me from whom they come."

"Rather ask me," exclaimed Denison, with a smile, "from whom they do *not* come. Why, all our friends who are connected with the Marquis, have written. First of all, there is the Marquis himself, who insists that you shall pay him a visit at Edenbridge—where, by the bye, he dwells almost entirely: for, as you are aware, he has bestowed the Stamford Manor estate upon his son Francis and the beautiful Angela. I passed a couple of days at Stamford Manor, and was delighted with the perfect picture of domestic happiness which there prevails. You cannot fancy how young Paton has improved: he has quite a manly appearance, and has almost lost that boyish beauty which, so to speak, used to characterise him. He is now a handsome young man. His wife Angela is, if possible, more lovely than when we saw her led a bride to the altar and when I had the honour of giving her away. They have a beautiful boy—now three months old—of whom, as you may suppose, they are dotingly fond. Frank has written, inviting you to the Manor."

"I shall assuredly accept the invitation," replied Hawkshaw,—"and that of the Marquis also. Whom else did you see?"

"Count Christoval and his splendid Countess. You know that his lordship has purchased a fine estate in the neighbourhood of Edenbridge; so that the Countess sees her father the Marquis of Eagledean nearly every day. On my honour, if it were possible for her ladyship to look handsomer than she was wont to do, she does now:—matrimony has improved her. She is a splendid woman!"

"They have no children, I believe?" remarked Hawkshaw.

"None," answered Denison: "but the Count is not the less devoted to his wife on that score. They are all in all to each other, and do not seem to want any addition to their family. The tenants and peasantry on their estate speak in the highest terms of them: the Count is an excellent landlord; and the Countess is profuse, though secret and unostentatious, with her charities. You will find amongst your letters one from that excellent-hearted Spanish nobleman, inviting you to stay with him."

"Another visit that I am resolved to pay," responded Hawkshaw. "These pictures of domestic felicity quite enchant me. Pray proceed with them."

"Oh, they are not yet exhausted!" exclaimed Denison. "I visited Everton Park, which is in Hertfordshire, about twenty miles from London. You know that this belongs to Lord Everton, who married Miss Leyden."

"And a sweet pretty girl I thought her on her wedding-day," cried Hawkshaw. "Four such lovely brides were never to be seen before assembled in one room—and never will be seen again. By the way, what has become of the young lord's uncle—the old villain who kept him so long in captivity, deprived of his just rights?"

"He perished miserably of some incurable and excruciating malady, about six or eight months ago, on the Continent. From intelligence which reached the Marquis of Eagledean, it appears that two hangers-on—a man named Mark Bellamy, and a woman called Mrs. Martin—clung to him until the very last. They led him a fearful life,—spending upon themselves the greater portion of the income so generously allowed by the much-injured nephew,—and leaving the old man sometimes in want of the barest necessaries. However, he is gone to another world; and what has become of Bellamy and Mrs. Martin I have not heard."

"But I presume and hope that Lord Everton and his beautiful wife are as happy as the other couples whom you have mentioned?" said Hawkshaw.

"Equally so," responded Mr. Denison. "They have one child—a son whom they doat upon, and whom they contemplate with pride as the heir to the title and estates. Everton Park is one of the most beautiful spots in England. It was thither, as you are aware, that Frank and Elisabeth were conveyed in their childhood to see their *then* unhappy mother, the present happy Marchioness of Eagledean. Frank and the Countess of Christoval have been on a visit to the Park; and I can fancy what their feelings were when they again looked upon those scenes of which they had thus obtained a glimpse in their childhood, and which must have been associated with such mysterious memories until the secret of their birth was cleared up. Amongst your letters is one from Lord Everton—or Adolphus, as all his friends and relatives call him: it likewise contains an invitation—and as you have decided on accepting the others, you cannot refuse this."

"Nor should I think of doing so," answered Hawkshaw. "And now there remains one more couple for you to speak of."

"Mr. Deveril and Lady Florina," observed Mr. Denison. "It is just the same story with regard to them as it was in respect to the others; and if I had said at once that all the four couples at whose weddings we were present, enjoy an equal amount of felicity, I might have summed up these elaborate details in a very few words."

"Not too elaborate, my dear friend," replied Hawkshaw, "inasmuch as they are so deeply interesting. I suppose Deveril and his wife have long ago entered upon possession of the estate which the Marquis of Eagledean, Count Christoval, and Lord Everton jointly purchased for them? And that, I believe, is at no great distance from Edenbridge?"

"Not above a dozen miles," answered Denison; "and it is a sweet spot. Deveril and his wife, the charming Florina, are so happy in their married state, and with their little girl—a lovely child, by the bye, just four months old—that if there be a drawback, it is only on account of the life led by Florina's brother, Lord Harold Staunton."

"Ah!" ejaculated Hawkshaw, "I used to like that young nobleman at one time—I mean when he was staying down here at the Castle, the year before last, and when he nearly got killed by being thrown off my thorough-bred. But I am afraid he is a sad fellow."

"He is living almost openly with Lady Saxondale," responded Denison. "Nothing could be more shameless: her ladyship seems not merely lost to all sense of decency, but to hold up her head higher in her profligacy and disgrace than she ever did when standing on the pinnacle of a stainless reputation. I understand that Lord Harold Staunton is constantly at Saxondale House—that he almost lives there entirely—and that though he has a lodging somewhere in the neighbourhood—decency's last rag, as it may be called—yet that he more frequently sleeps at Saxondale House than at his own abode. Conceive what an example for a son, to be the constant companion of his own mother's acknowledged paramour!"

"It is shocking," observed Hawkshaw: then, after a little hesitation, he inquired, "Has anything more been heard of Juliana?"

"Ah! by the bye," ejaculated Denison, "I have not seen you since that dreadful exposure which was recently published in the English newspapers, translated from the French——I mean the startling discovery that Juliana's husband who passed as the Count of Toledo, was none other than a notorious Spanish bandit Ramon de Collantes."

"I also read that statement," observed Hawkshaw: "and I must say that I somewhat pitied the unfortunate young lady, notwithstanding her vile conduct towards me. Is it known what has become of her?"

"I have not heard," responded Mr. Denison. "Heavens! what a family it is! The only one who has turned out well, is Constance the Marchioness of Villebelle: and it was altogether by flying in her mother's face and bestowing her hand where her heart was already given, that she has thus prospered. Her very disobedience has therefore been the source of her good fortune,—which almost proves that to be undutiful to such a mother was to be on the safe side."

"Did you hear anything, when in London, of Lord Saxondale himself?"

"Only that he has become so dissipated as to

be well nigh past redemption, even if he had any friend who would undertake the task of reforming him. He drinks deeply; and, it is believed, never goes to bed sober. I do not suppose that his mother would care very much if he were to drink himself to death; as I fancy that in this case, if he should have attained his majority, the great bulk of the property—if not all—would still remain with her: but I do not exactly know how this is."

"It was a shocking occurrence—the death of his wife," observed Mr. Hawkshaw. "You remember that accident took me to the spot at the time of the dreadful tragedy; and the unfortunate young man was very much afflicted. By the bye, if I recollect aright, he will be of age in the course of a few days. I heard one of the tenants saying so yesterday morning; and the man was wondering whether there would be any festivities at the Castle. But it would appear that no instructions have been received to make preparations for the reception of the family; and therefore I suppose no rejoicings are to take place."

At this point of the conversation, Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw reached a spot where the road turned off towards Gainsborough in one direction, and whence there was a bye-lane leading by a circuitous route to the former gentleman's residence in another direction. Here therefore they parted; and the Squire continued his way towards the town. Finding that he was a little behind his time for the appointment which he had to keep, he turned out of the road in order to take a short cut across the fields; and in so doing, he drew near to the river's bank, at no great distance from Saxondale Castle. There had recently been a flood, caused by the heavy rains, which had made the Trent overflow and inundate the adjacent fields to a very considerable extent,—thereby causing much damage. The bailiff of the Saxondale estate had consequently deemed it necessary to heighten the bank in the particular place where the swollen river had poured its surplus upon the meadows; and several labourers were now busily engaged on this work.

As Mr. Hawkshaw drew near the place just alluded to, it struck him that he beheld some sensation amongst the labourers,—five or six of whom were grouped in a particular spot, and appeared to be occupied in the examination of something which they were passing from one to another. The moment they saw the Squire, they rushed towards him,—the foremost carrying a pistol,—while their ejaculations at once afforded a clue to the comprehension of the excitement which animated them.

"This is the thing that did the deed!" exclaimed one.

"There can be no doubt of it!—double-barrelled!" cried another.

"Who knows but what it will all be found out now?" remarked a third. "Poor creatures! it was a shocking murder!"

"Here, sir!" exclaimed the man who carried the pistol, and who now presented it to Mr. Hawkshaw: "this has just been found in the river."

But scarcely had he thus spoken, when another labourer came rushing towards the spot,—carrying in his hands something which appeared to be a bundle of clothes tied round with a cord: but the package was covered with mud, and the water was dripping out of it.

"Here!" exclaimed the individual who carried it; "I have just this moment fished this out of the Trent!"—and he also bounded towards Mr. Hawkshaw, who had reined in his horse to hear what the other men had to say.

He took the pistol, and examined it attentively. It was covered with rust; and the barrels were completely stopped up with mud—so that at the first glance it was not easy to ascertain any particulars as to the precise workmanship of the weapon. But as Hawkshaw turned it over and over in his hands, a strange and horrible suspicion gradually arose in his mind. He examined it still more closely—he drew forth his kerchief and cleansed away the dirt as well as he was able: the suspicion was strengthened—a deep gloom, blended with horror and dismay, appeared upon his countenance. Still he was unwilling to suffer that suspicion to arise into a positive conviction: he hoped to God that it might be all an error on his part! He essayed to decipher the maker's name: but the steel on which it was engraved, was too completely encrusted with rust to enable him to make it out. He rubbed away with his handkerchief—but all to no purpose.

"There can be no doubt, my good fellows," he said, at length breaking silence, "that this is the weapon which caused the death of those two unfortunate women whose mysterious murder created such a sensation in this neighbourhood the year before last. As a magistrate, I will keep possession of the fatal weapon for the present. But what have you there?" he added, turning to the man who had brought the packet.

"It is a bundle of clothes, sir," was the response.

"Open them," said Mr. Hawkshaw; "and let us see what they are:"—and still his countenance expressed mingled horror and consternation.

The labouring man placed the bundle on the grass; and kneeling down, cut the cord which held it together. First he unrolled and shook out a large cloak—and then a pair of pantaloons. In the midst were a pair of boots, a couple of stockings, and a large stone. The cloak was evidently a man's; and the stone had no doubt been placed in the bundle in order to sink it when thrown into the river. The labouring man now explained that having to wade in the water for the purpose of pursuing his employment in heightening the bank, his foot had come in contact with a soft object, which he at first fancied was a dead body: but putting down his hand, he drew up the bundle now produced. Neither he nor the other labourers seemed able to comprehend how this bundle could be in any way connected with the pistol, so far as links in the chain of evidence were concerned: they were therefore somewhat surprised when Mr. Hawkshaw, in a low deep voice, which was full of painful emotion, said, "Heaven is working out its own inscrutable ways; and the river is made to give up its secrets in order to bring the foulest of crimes home to its perpetrator."

There was a solemn pause, during which the labourers stood with their eyes wandering with an expression of awful horror from the pistol to the clothes, and back again to the pistol.

"Fold up those garments again," said Mr. Hawk-

shaw: "I will take charge of them likewise. Here! you can envelope them in my handkerchief—it is large enough for the purpose."

His orders were executed; and having distributed some money amongst the men, the Squire rode off with the bundle and the weapon. But he did not pursue his way to Gainsborough: he turned his horse's head in another direction, and rode straight, at a brisk gallop, back to his own residence. On arriving there, he gave the bundle of clothes to one of the servants, with instructions to cleanse and dry them thoroughly. He then proceeded to his own chamber, where he set himself busily to work, with oil and a piece of leather, to remove the rust from that part of the pistol where the maker's name was engraved. In about half-an-hour he succeeded in deciphering that name; and it was indeed the one which he had from the very first expected to find there. He now sent off a groom with a note to Mr. Denison, requesting an immediate visit from that gentleman, on business of the utmost importance.

It was not until a late hour in the afternoon that Mr. Denison arrived at Hawkshaw Hall; and in the meantime the clothes had been thoroughly cleansed and dried. When Mr. Denison was ushered into the parlour where the Squire received him, he was much astonished at the look of profound sorrow, mingled with consternation and horror, which his friend wore; and this feeling was enhanced when he beheld a pistol, a cloak, trousers, a pair of boots, and a couple of stockings lying upon the table.

"What has occurred, Hawkshaw?" asked the old gentleman, with a degree of nervous suspense.

"The murder of the ballet-dancer and her servant-maid," answered the Squire solemnly, "is no longer involved in mystery!"

"Indeed!" ejaculated Denison; and he glanced towards the things on the table, suspecting that they were connected with the announcement just made to him—though, with the single exception of the pistol, he did not understand how they could possibly furnish links in the chain of evidence.

"Yes," continued Hawkshaw; "it is from those articles which you are surveying, that I have gleaned the damning truth. That pistol sent the unfortunate victims to the other world; and those were the garments worn by the murderer at the time. I understand it all, Denison! But, my God! what a blow for the relatives of the wretched assassin!"

"Speak, Hawkshaw!" exclaimed Mr. Denison: "who is he? You evidently know him——"

"And you also, my dear friend," added the Squire, profoundly distressed. "He is——"

"Who?"

"Lord Harold Staunton!"

Mr. Denison staggered as if smitten violently with a hammer: he became pale as death—and sinking upon a seat, murmured, "Heavens, the poor Marquis and Florina! Lady Macdonald too ——it is frightful!"

"Frightful indeed!" said Hawkshaw: and the two friends exchanged looks of indescribable horror.

"But are you sure?" exclaimed Mr. Denison, catching at the hope that the Squire might possibly be deceived. "Are you certain that you may not be mistaken?"

"No, my dear friend—the truth is indeed but too apparent. Listen—and I will give you all requisite explanations. I comprehend everything as plainly as if the murderer's confession were made, and the hideous details were still ringing in our ears. Circumstances which wore quite another complexion at the time, now reveal themselves in their true light. But if—as there is every reason to suspect—that vile woman was herself an accomplice——"

"Who?" demanded Mr. Denison, hurriedly.

"Lady Saxondale," replied Hawkshaw. "But let me give you the promised explanations. That pistol belonged to Lord Harold Staunton. One day I went up to the room which he occupied at the Castle: he was busy preparing his fishing-tackle—and I lingered a little while to converse with him. Accident led me to examine his pistol-case, which was made to contain two—but one only was there: the other was missing. I looked at the one which was left. I remember commenting upon its workmanship: I observed the maker's name—and I remarked that it was a celebrated one. This pistol which lies before you, Denison, is the exact fellow to the one which I then saw!"

"Good heavens!—then there is no doubt!" said the old gentleman, shuddering.

"Alas! not the slightest," rejoined Hawkshaw. "And now I bethink me, there was something very singular in Staunton's manner throughout that conversation——I remember too that at one moment——Ah! it was when I observed that he was doubtless a good shot—he became so deadly pale, and his countenance suddenly wore so ghastly a look, that I grew terrified on his account. I however attributed those appearances to his recent accident: but that accident itself, Denison, I now feel convinced was an intentional one—— Yes, I comprehend it all!"

"Do you mean the accident with your thoroughbred?"

"I do. Heavens! what a deeply laid project! with what demon-like artifice was the whole plan arranged! Do you not fathom my meaning? The wretched young man threw himself from the horse in order that he might obtain a sufficient plea and excuse for keeping his own chamber. Thus was the opportunity afforded for committing the crime: while the very fact that he was believed to be stretched upon a bed of illness, was of course calculated to avert even the very possibility of suspicion from himself. On that fatal night, therefore, he must have stolen forth from the Castle——"

"But how?" inquired Denison, experiencing a fearful and likewise bewildering interest in these explanations.

"How?" echoed Hawkshaw. "Was it not proven to us, a short time after the very tragedy itself, that Staunton knew full well how to obtain secret ingress to the Castle? That tree which grows up from the river's bed, and the branches of which spread against the windows of the tapestry-chamber——"

"Ah! and where his kerchief was discovered," ejaculated Denison. "Then you think that on the fatal night of the murder, he must have stolen forth from his chamber—he must have passed out of the Castle by that window——"

"No doubt of it," replied Hawkshaw. "It is

equally clear that these were the garments which he wore on the occasion. He must have waded through the stream, under the Castle wall—his clothes were therefore wet and muddy—they would have served as evidences, or at least would have engendered strange suspicions, if seen in that state by any of the domestics. Is it not therefore clear enough, that in order to cause all traces of his dread crime to disappear, on his return to the Castle, those garments were tied up in a bundle and were doubtless thrown from one of the windows overlooking the river? The current has since carried the package higher up towards Gainsborough, notwithstanding the weight of the stone placed inside for the purpose of sinking it. As for the pistol, you yourself, Denison, suggested a long while ago—when that masquerading dress was brought to us—that the pistol should be searched for. I remember well the words you used at the time. You described the several influences under which a murderer throws away his weapon: first, that nothing criminatory may be found upon him, if suddenly stopped and searched—secondly, in the awful feeling of horror which naturally succeeds the commission of a crime—and thirdly, on being alarmed by the sound of voices or footsteps. Now, we well know that Lord Eagledean and Mr. Deveril were upon the spot almost immediately after the shots were fired; and therefore it may have been under any one of those influences—or all combined—that the wretched assassin flung his weapon into the Trent. In a word, there can be no doubt that this assassin was none other than Lord Harold Staunton, and it remains for us to decide what course we have to adopt."

Hawkshaw then explained the circumstances under which the pistol and the clothes came into his possession, and which are already known to the reader.

"That this foul murder was committed by Lord Harold Staunton," said Mr. Denison, "there can be no possible doubt after everything you have told me. That Lady Saxondale was his accomplice, is likewise to be presumed—though we are still totally in the dark as to the reason which could have prompted so fearful a crime. With these motives however we have nothing to do: it is with facts that we have to deal. What course can we take, Hawkshaw? On the one hand, if, being cognisant of a crime, we fail to give up the criminal to justice, we offend not merely against the laws, but likewise against that community of which we are members. But on the other hand, our friendship for the Marquis of Eagledean, and for all who are connected with the miserable murderer, prompts us to take some other steps. I confess that I am at a loss—I know not what counsel to proffer."

"It may be," replied Hawkshaw, "that the Marquis of Eagledean will decide, if appealed to, that the law must take its course."

"Then let that appeal be made to him," cried Denison: "and we shall both stand acquitted of any breach of friendship or any undue severity in the matter. This is the best course to be adopted; and you, my dear friend, must set off without delay to see the Marquis of Eagledean. The evidences of the crime you can bear with you; and then you will act as circumstances shall suggest."

"Yes," responded the Squire, after a few moments' reflection: "the plan you have marked out is the best."

CHAPTER CLXX.

FURTHER UNRAVELMENT OF THE TANGLED SKEIN.

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon of the following day; that Mr. Hawkshaw arrived at Edenbridge Park. The Marquis and Marchioness were at home; and both were much concerned on account of the severe illness of a domestic whom they much valued. The reader will recollect a certain Mrs. Jameson, of whom mention was made at the time the Marquis went to Rhavadorgwy for the purpose of presenting himself to the object of his life's love—Lady Everton at *that* time—but who had since become his wife. Mrs. Jameson had long been in her ladyship's service: she was now exceedingly old, and was stretched upon a bed of sickness from which it was feared she would never rise again. The Marquis and Marchioness were however employing all available human means to restore her. The surgeon who had been called in from the town of Edenbridge, had advised that a consultation should take place with some eminent London physician; and the Marquis had left it to the medical attendant to use his own discretion in respect to the practitioner whose aid was to be thus invoked. It happened that the Edenbridge surgeon was well acquainted with Dr. Ferney,—to whom he accordingly sent a pressing letter beseeching him to come down to the Park. Ferney,—though making it a general rule not to visit patients at any considerable distance from London,—did not consider himself very well able to refuse compliance with so urgent an appeal; and he accordingly set off for the Park. He had not been many minutes at the mansion, when Mr. Hawkshaw, arriving by the next train from London, likewise reached his destination.

The Edenbridge surgeon and Dr. Ferney were consulting together upon the invalid's case: the Marchioness was in the room of the invalid herself: the Marquis was alone in a parlour, when Mr. Hawkshaw was announced. His lordship at once saw by the Squire's manner that something of unusual importance had occurred; and Hawkshaw, with no more prefatory words than were sufficient to introduce so distressing a subject, proceeded to explain to the Marquis of Eagledean all those particulars with which the reader has been made acquainted in the previous chapter. His lordship was for some minutes overwhelmed with horror and consternation. He knew that his nephew was immersed to the very lips in all kinds of profligacies: he knew likewise that Harold had at one time plotted against his life: but he had never suspected that his miserable nephew was already a blood-stained murderer. The intelligence therefore, though judiciously prefaced and delicately announced, filled Lord Eagledean with the most horrible feelings; and indeed it was no wonder that for some minutes he was totally unable to give utterance to a word. Profoundly did the good-hearted Squire commiserate his noble friend: and he was more than ever satisfied

with himself for having adopted this course of first of all communicating with his lordship ere taking any extreme measure upon his own responsibility.

"My dear Hawkshaw," said the Marquis, at length breaking silence, but speaking in a broken and tremulous voice,—at the same time that he took the Squire's hand, and pressed it with convulsive nervousness,—"you and Denison have acted most generously. Oh, that vile young man!—— Good heavens! is it possible that he should be so deeply stained with guilt? Accursed be Lady Saxondale!—for she it is who has thus urged him on step by step from one crime to another. Ah! my dear friend, I can now give you some explanations which will help to clear up whatsoever mystery still envelops that horrible tragedy, so far as you are acquainted with it. The masquerade-dress, of the discovery of which you told me a long time ago, was worn by Lady Saxondale on a particular night, when she had an appointment with my wretched nephew,—the object of that appointment being to incite him to a duel with William Deveril. It has all along been evident that this dress fell into the hands of Emily Archer the ballet-dancer, who was the mistress of Edmund Saxondale. We may therefore surmise that she gleaned enough information on the point to be enabled to use that dress as a means of extortion or coercion with regard to Lady Saxondale. And now, Hawkshaw, you can understand wherefore her ladyship had so deep an interest in clearing her path of the unfortunate ballet-dancer. I confess there have been times, ever since you mentioned the discovery of that masquerade-dress some time back,—and which discovery proved that it was this particular costume which the women had with them in the parcel on the evening of the murder,—there have been times, I say, when distant suspicions have flitted through my mind, that Lady Saxondale might possibly have not been altogether a stranger to the foul assassination of those victims. But still there was no positive evidence to justify such a thought; and at all events I never for a moment fancied that my wretched nephew could have been implicated in the tragedy. I knew that he was stretched upon his bed at the time; and never for an instant did it occur to me that his indisposition was feigned for the purpose of enabling him to commit, with all the greater ease and security, so execrable a crime. However, it is, alas! but too apparent *now* that such has been the real truth; and I am well nigh broken-hearted at the thought."

"Your lordship indeed requires all your fortitude," said Hawkshaw, profoundly moved by the spectacle of his noble friend's affliction. "Ah! I do indeed comprehend, from all that you have just said, how it was that Lady Saxondale might have had the strongest possible motives for the perpetration—or rather the instigation of so foul a deed. But what, my lord, is to be done? As yet no exposure has taken place. The incidents which I have been relating to you, are known only to Denison and myself. Rest assured that our friendship towards yourself and all connected with you, shall over-ride every other consideration, if you so will it. Should you decide upon maintaining silence in respect to this dreadful discovery, for the sake of the amiable Florina and the kind-hearted Lady Macdonald, you have but to say the word. It will be easy for me to return into Lincolnshire and say something to those labouring men which will give them to understand that the clue which I at one moment fancied to be obtained, has not turned out to be the right one."

"Hawkshaw, whatever may occur," responded the Marquis, "I never can forget this kindness on your part, and that of my friend Denison. I scarcely feel myself justified in allowing selfish considerations to outweigh the sense of duty which we all owe to the law and to society at large. But yet there are the gravest motives——yes, the gravest——"

The Marquis stopped short, and walked abruptly towards the window, where he remained for some minutes wrapped up in the deepest thought. He envisaged all that must occur if justice should be allowed to take its course. That Lady Saxondale was not merely the accomplice but the instigatrix of the crime, was beyond the possibility of doubt. If therefore Lord Harold Staunton were arrested for the murder, *her* guilt must inevitably transpire. And then, what would be the feelings of William Deveril? Should he, after having made such noble sacrifices to save his mother from exposure, shame, and ruin,—should he be now compelled to see her held up to a world's execration for a crime even still more terrible than that from the consequences of which he had striven to shield her? Should he be forced to behold his mother plunged into a felon's gaol—dragged before a public tribunal—and ultimately sent out of the world by the hand of the executioner? Oh! the Marquis but too well knew that all this would break the generous heart of Florina's husband—that Florina herself would sink down prematurely to the grave—and that thus the crimes of the guilty would redound with horrible effect upon the heads of the innocent. These were the reflections which passed through the mind of the Marquis of Eagledean.

But there were other considerations which he had likewise to take into account. During the fourteen or fifteen months which had now elapsed since William Deveril discovered that he was in reality the son of Lady Saxondale, he had occasionally called upon her in Park Lane: she had always received him alone—she had lavished upon him caresses which appeared the tenderest and the most affectionate; and he loved her notwithstanding all the past. He was ignorant that Lord Harold Staunton was her almost avowed paramour. Married as he was to Staunton's sister, no one whom he met—not even the most casual acquaintances—would so far outrage delicacy as to make the slightest allusion to such a circumstance. He therefore hoped and believed that his mother Lady Saxondale was now leading a quiet and respectable life; and thus he had no hesitation in visiting her from time to time, as above described. Of course Florina knew not that he ever went to Saxondale House: she had continued ignorant of the tremendous secret of his birth—a secret now known but to himself, Lady Saxondale, the Marquis of Eagledean, and Angela (Francis Paton's wife). But even supposing that the discovery which Hawkshaw had come to Edenbridge Park to announce, should be hushed up and buried in silence,—how was it possible that the Marquis of Eagledean could suffer the pure-minded and virtuous William Deveril to go on visiting his mother—a murderess?

No: there was something terrific in such a course —something outrageous to every proper sentiment —something against which every feeling of propriety revolted. Then, what was he to do? This question kept agitating in his lordship's mind, as he stood deliberating at the window. There really seemed to be only this plan:—that the veil of secrecy should still be kept drawn over the tremendous guilt of Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton, so far as exposure to the world was concerned; but that measures must be adopted to force Lady Saxondale to go abroad, and *for ever*—so that no more interviews should take place between herself and her lawfully born offspring, William Deveril. As for Staunton, he likewise must be compelled to depart to some distant clime, with a warning that his only hope of safety lay in making this self-expatriation eternal.

Such were the resolves to which the Marquis of Eagledean came: but while explaining them to Mr. Hawkshaw, he did not of course make the slightest allusion to the fact that William Deveril was Lady Saxondale's son.

"My dear friend," he said, "I accept the alternative which your noble generosity and that of Mr. Denison has left open. There are too many on whose innocent heads the effect of all this guilt would terrifically redound, to permit an exposure to take place. The veil of secrecy must not therefore be lifted from that dark tragedy. But at the same time, if we forbear from handing over the criminals to the grasp of the law, we must not suffer them to escape without some chastisement. We must force them into exile, to different parts of the world—with the warning that all this forbearance will cease if they ever set foot upon the English soil again. Come, my friend—we will depart for London: we will go together and see these guilty beings——I hope for the last time!"

Mr. Hawkshaw expressed his readiness to accompany the Marquis, and indeed to yield to his views in every particular. While refreshments were served up to the Squire, Lord Eagledean sought the Marchioness in order to inform her that business of a somewhat urgent nature, in which his friend Hawkshaw was concerned, was about to take him to London, and that he should not probably return until the following day. Meanwhile the consultation between Dr. Ferney and the Edenbridge surgeon had terminated—the physician had recommended the mode of treatment which was the best for adoption in respect to the invalid—and he was now about to take his departure. As a matter of course, the Marquis offered him a seat in his own carriage to the railway-station, which Dr. Ferney accepted. The physician thus became a fellow-traveller with Lord Eagledean and Mr. Hawkshaw to London: for when the station was reached, the Marquis could not possibly express a desire to separate from Dr. Ferney's society in the train,—though in his heart he would much rather have travelled alone with Mr. Hawkshaw. In about an hour and a half the metropolis was reached; and as they were all three going to the West End, they took a vehicle at the terminus. The conversation had all the while been upon indifferent topics—so that Ferney had not the slightest idea whither his two travelling-companions were actually bound. Conduit Street, where the physician dwelt, was all in the way towards Park Lane: the driver of the vehicle therefore received orders first of all to proceed to Dr. Ferney's dwelling. In due time this destination was reached; and the physician alighted at his own door. As he was about to take leave, it occurred to him that having been most liberally treated by the Marquis in respect to the amount of the fee placed in his hand immediately after the consultation at Edenbridge Park,—he was bound for courtesy's sake to offer some little apology for what might appear a most rude neglect on his part in respect to a certain matter, but which he had his own good reasons for having hitherto so long remained silent upon.

He was standing on the curb-stone, looking into the vehicle where the Marquis and Hawkshaw remained seated. Hands had been shaken, and farewells said—when that thought to which we have just alluded, occurred to the physician. It was a most disagreeable—a most painful topic, for him to touch upon: it revived so many afflicting associations;—but still he felt himself bound, in common courtesy, to say a word upon the subject; and he summoned up all his fortitude for the purpose.

"My lord," he said, "I have not forgotten that a long, long time ago you honoured me with a call, and brought me a phial the contents of which you requested me to analyse. On three or four occasions after that, your lordship called again, to inquire whether I had made the analysis; and I feel ashamed when I reflect that I continuously answered I had not as yet found time. Your lordship suddenly ceased from calling altogether; and during the lengthy interval which has passed since then, I have often feared you might have felt offended with me. When therefore I received the letter inviting me to Edenbridge, I was gratified by the thought that your lordship was not angry——"

"No, Dr. Ferney," interrupted the Marquis of Eagledean; "I had ceased to think of the matter:" —though the real truth was that after the discovery of William Deveril's parentage, his lordship had taken no farther step to penetrate any deeper into Lady Saxondale's guilt. "I can assure you I have not been offended; and as the interest attached to that phial has passed away, you need not suffer it to remain for another moment in your thoughts. And now farewell."

"Farewell, my lord," answered Dr. Ferney. "Can I tell the driver whither he is to convey you?"

"To Saxondale House, in Park Lane," responded the Marquis.

The mention of that name, so closely following upon the discourse relative to the phial of poison, struck the physician as something not merely accidental, but superstitiously portentous. It gave a most poignant keenness to all the memories which had just been excited in his brain: the effect produced upon him was that of a sudden shock: he started—turned deadly pale—and then stood gazing in a species of ghastly consternation upon the Marquis of Eagledean.

"Heavens! are you ill, Dr. Ferney?" exclaimed the nobleman, who, as well as Hawkshaw, was astonished and affrighted by the physician's looks.

"Yes—I am ill—I—I feel——very ill," gasped Ferney, scarcely knowing what he said, and actually experiencing the most sickening sensations.

"Ill, my kind benefactor! my best of friends!" exclaimed an old man, who happened to come up to the spot at the moment, after having been for his usual little walk; and just as he was about to ascend the front door steps, he caught those words which fell from Dr. Ferney's lips. "Let me support you!"

"Never mind, Thompson—I am better now," said the physician, suddenly rallying and regaining his self-possession.

"Thompson?" ejaculated the Marquis of Eagledean, who, though the name was a common one enough, never heard it mentioned without thinking of the individual who, if he were found, could doubtless throw so much light upon William Deveril's early history. "Did you say this gentleman's name was Mr. Thompson?"

"Yes, my lord," answered Ferney, astonished at the question,—as was also Thompson himself, and even Hawkshaw too: for it certainly seemed a very strange one, the motive for putting it not being apparent.

"I am sure you will pardon me, Mr. Thompson," said the Marquis, "for the seeming discourtesy of my behaviour: but I have vowed that whenever I meet any one bearing your name, and being of a certain age, I would not fail to put a particular query. I have no doubt that I shall receive from you the same answer I have already had from a dozen other Mr. Thompsons to whom I have addressed myself on the subject. But nevertheless I shall take this liberty with you."

"This is the Marquis of Eagledean—and that is his friend Mr. Hawkshaw," said Ferney to Thompson, who accordingly bowed in acknowledgment of the introductions.

"Your lordship can take no liberty," said Thompson: "and therefore whatsoever question you may have to put to me, shall be readily answered."

"It is a simple one," rejoined the Marquis, really attaching but little importance to the incident: for the antipodes are not farther from each other, than from his imagination was the hope that his query would elicit the response it was destined to meet. "Again I must ask you to excuse my freedom: indeed the question itself may savour of impertinence: but I can assure you it is through no illegitimate curiosity I ask if you were ever at any period of your life connected with theatricals?"

"Most assuredly I was, my lord," answered Thompson.

"You were?" ejaculated the Marquis, starting as if galvanised. "But one word more!" he added, with a feverish excitement which astonished those who beheld it. "Were you ever yourself the manager of a company of performers?"

"I was, my lord," rejoined Thompson.

"You were? Question begets question!" exclaimed Lord Eagledean. "Excuse me, but were you acquainted with a family named Deveril?"

"I knew them well, my lord," was the response, given with increasing astonishment on the part of Thompson, and in which Hawkshaw and Ferney both naturally shared.

"A man and his wife—with a boy and girl," continued the Marquis, with rapid and excited utterance,—"the girl named Angela—the boy William——"

"To be sure! the very same!" ejaculated Thompson. "But the boy was not really their son——I have been questioned about this before—by a woman named Madge Somers—who was murdered, I think I heard——"

"Enough, enough, Mr. Thompson!" cried the Marquis. "Another time—to-morrow—or presently—I will come and have some conversation with you."

"Dear me, my lord!" said Thompson, more and more surprised at all that was taking place; "I hope there's nothing amiss. As for the boy I am speaking of—he must be a young man now—he had the mark of a strawberry on his shoulder——"

"What?" ejaculated Ferney, once more becoming deadly pale—and once more too staggering back as if seized with a sudden indisposition. "Good heavens! is everything about to transpire?"—and these words, quite involuntarily spoken, were uttered with an indescribable anguish and terror.

"I see," said the Marquis, at once convinced that Ferney himself had something important which he could communicate, and that there was likewise something more serious and significant than sudden indisposition when he had turned so ghastly pale at the mention of the name of Saxondale,—"I see that I must have some immediate conversation with you both. Hawkshaw, my dear friend, excuse me if I may now appear to be treating you with a want of confidence: but——"

"No apologies, my dear Marquis," said the Squire. "I am well aware that whatever you do is for the best."

Lord Eagledean alighted from the vehicle; and Dr. Ferney requested the Squire to enter the house, observing that whatsoever private discourse had to be held might take place in another room: but even as he spoke, the physician's manner was still strangely confused—he trembled nervously—and the ghastliness of pallor seemed to have settled itself immoveably upon his countenance. They all entered the dwelling together: Mr. Hawkshaw was shown into one room—while the Marquis of Eagledean accompanied Dr. Ferney and Thompson to another. We shall leave the Squire to the astonishment into which all these proceedings naturally flung him; and we shall see what took place between the other three.

Dr. Ferney sank, like one thoroughly exhausted both in mind and body, upon a sofa. The fortitude which had so long upheld him in the maintenance of Lady Saxondale's various secrets, appeared altogether to have given way: he looked like a man who felt that the time destined by heaven itself for the fullest revelations, had now come—as if the veil of mystery which had so long shrouded the past, was to be drawn aside by the invisible hand of Providence itself. He was thoroughly crushed and spirit-broken: remorse for the part which he had enacted in suffering himself to be made the tool of that wily woman, seized upon his soul: his sensation was that of a guilty person who feels that the hour has come when penitence must ensue and atonement be made;—and under such influences as these, the spell of that very infatuation which now for twenty-one long years had bound him to the image of Lady Saxondale, was itself well nigh broken. At all events the talisman had lost its

EASTERN SIDE OF SAXONDALE CASTLE.

hitherto marvellous power: he had a conscience on which there rested a heavy load—and he longed to ease himself thereof.

Both Thompson and the Marquis of Eagledean saw that Dr. Ferney was painfully agitated—that bitter feelings were torturing his soul; and they scarcely knew what conjecture to form as to the precise cause of so much trouble. Thompson especially,—who had lived with the physician for the last eighteen months,—was more astonished than even the Marquis: because he knew how pure and upright was the tenour of his benefactor's existence—he had looked upon him only as the slave of science—he could scarcely fancy it possible that he had ever committed a crime!

"Dr. Ferney—and you also, Mr. Thompson," said the Marquis of Eagledean, addressing them both in a solemn manner,—"the finger of heaven is visible in the incidents which have taken place within the last few minutes. It seemed destined that I was to mention the name of Saxondale in order to excite some particular feeling in *your* breast, Dr. Ferney: it seemed too, Mr. Thompson, that I was simultaneously thrown in *your* way in order to receive from your lips those statements which you evidently have it in your power to make in respect to a young gentleman who is known to the world as William Deveril."

"For my part, my lord," at once responded Thompson, "I have not the slightest interest in making any concealment—especially as I am even now ignorant of the use or value which the details I am enabled to communicate, may prove to you. Indeed, all I know is this:—that many long years ago I was with my company of performers in one of the Midland Counties. Amongst that company were a young couple of the name of Deveril,—a steady, well-behaved, respectable pair—an exception indeed to the general rule with regard to the profession which circumstances had compelled them to embrace. One day they were walking out together in the neighbourhood of some town in a Midland County—I forget exactly which at this moment—when they were struck by the appearance of an elderly gipsy woman, who had a beautiful baby in her arms. The child was about four months old; and though so sweetly pretty, looked sickly and delicate: it was moreover clad in rags. The Deverils stopped and spoke to the woman—who accosted them, indeed, to solicit alms. They saw at once that the child was not of the gipsy-race: for its complexion was perfectly fair. They felt assured it had been stolen and was now carried about in the arms of a mendicant for the purpose of exciting sympathy. They questioned the gipsy very closely; and the tale which she told, seemed too roundabout and too full of prevarications to be consistent with truth. She vowed that she had received the child from another gipsy woman who was a perfect stranger to her—that this other gipsy woman had told her she had got the child a few weeks back from a gang of tramps of her own race, but with whom she had likewise been previously unacquainted. Whether true or whether false, the narrative afforded the Deverils no clue to the discovery of the unfortunate child's parents. In their indignation at the thought that the poor little innocent might have possibly been torn away from a comfortable home, they made use of some threatening language to the elderly gipsy woman—to the effect that there were laws and authorities to compel her to give a more satisfactory account than she had done of the way in which she became possessed of that infant. Either being really alarmed—or else having had the child already long enough upon her hands—the gipsy suddenly laid the infant down on the grass by the road-side, and darted away as fast as her legs could carry her. Considering that she was an elderly person, she sped at an astonishing rate; and though Deveril pursued her, so soon as he recovered from the astonishment into which the suddenness of that proceeding had thrown him, he could not overtake her. He lost her amidst a maze of lanes leading out from the high-road where the occurrence took place, and it is therefore probable that while he was pursuing one direction, she had plunged into some bye-path in another. When he retraced his way to the spot where he had left his wife, he found her seated on the bank with the child in her arms. Your lordship can guess the sequel. The Deverils were generous-hearted though poor; and they resolved to adopt the unfortunate infant that had thus been thrown in their way. They gave it their own surname of Deveril, and the Christian name of William. A year afterwards they had a child of their own; and of such angelic beauty was she, that they called her Angela. Not for a moment however did they think of renouncing the task they had imposed upon themselves of rearing the little William,—whom indeed they loved as much as if he had in reality been their own son. They were not less intelligent and considerate than they were kind-hearted: they accordingly resolved to bring up William with the idea that he was in truth their own offspring, until he should reach the age of manhood;—and to this resolution they came in order that as he himself grew up, he should not have his sensitive feelings wounded by being compelled to regard himself as an interloper in the bosom of that poor and humble family. Besides, they did not wish the tenderest years of his life to be saddened and disturbed by the knowledge that he had been torn from his own legitimate parents;—and thus was it for the poor boy's sake that he was brought up to consider himself as the son of those who from mere charity had adopted him. I esteemed the Deverils: I was on terms of intimacy with them, apart from being their employer in the dramatic profession;—and they confided all their motives and plans to me. Now, my lord, I have told you everything with which I am acquainted on this subject: but I may repeat what I ere now said in the street, that the child who was so adopted had the tiny mark of a strawberry just in this part where the neck joins the shoulder."

Thus speaking, Mr. Thompson indicated on his own person the spot to which he alluded with regard to William Deveril. The Marquis had listened with the profoundest attention and interest:—Dr. Ferney, with his countenance buried in his hands, had not appeared to listen at all: but he nevertheless had lost not a single word of everything Thompson had been saying; and he suddenly raised his eyes at the very instant that Thompson indicated the place where the strawberry-mark on William Deveril's shoulder would be found.

"Yes, yes—it was there too that I——"

He had ejaculated these words with a startling abruptness as he sprang up to his feet: but suddenly stopping short, without finishing the sentence, he placed his hand upon his brow, and sank back again on the sofa with an expression of ineffable anguish sweeping over his features.

"Dr. Ferney," said the Marquis of Eagledean, approaching the physician, and speaking in a voice of the deepest solemnity, "whatever you have to make known, I adjure you to reveal it, in the name of that Providence which has brought about the incidents of the hour that is passing!"

"Do you, my lord," inquired the physician, "know that William Deveril—the last child whom the poor players adopted?"

"I do," responded the Marquis. "He is married to my own niece: and what is more, I am acquainted with the real truth of his parentage."

"Ah, I understand it all! I comprehend it now!" ejaculated the miserable Ferney, literally writhing in mortal anguish. "But heaven knows that when I lent myself as that lady's instrument, I suspected not for what purpose it was to serve! My lord—and you, Mr. Thompson—you behold before you the man who perverted his scientific skill to the consummation of a fearful imposture: but I repeat——yes, solemnly I repeat, that I knew not at the time the iniquity I was assisting to consummate!"

"What mean you?" demanded the Marquis.

"I mean, my lord," responded Ferney, who felt as if some irresistible influence was now urging him to make the revelation,—"I mean that this right hand of mine formed upon the neck of him who now bears the title of Lord Saxondale, a peculiar mark—a mark of which the description was most accurately given to me—the mark of a strawberry!"

Having made this confession, Ferney once more sank down upon the sofa, a prey to feelings which may be better imagined than described. The Marquis stood transfixed in amazement: while an ejaculation expressive of a similar sentiment burst from the lips of Thompson.

"Yes—it was I who did it!" suddenly exclaimed Ferney, as he again sprang up from the sofa: and now there was a sort of maniac wildness in his looks and his manner. "Oh! truly have you observed, my lord, that the finger of heaven is visible in all this!—and I feel——yes, I feel that this is indeed the day for penitence, for atonement, and for retribution. Not another hour—not another unnecessary minute shall be wasted, ere wrong shall give place to right! Be the consequences to me what they may, I will do justice where justice ought to be done!"

It was with all the vehemence of the wildest emotions—with all the impassioned excitement of feelings painfully worked up—that the physician had given vent to that hurricane of words; and while their last echoes were still vibrating through the air, he rushed like one frenzied from the room.

"Stop, Dr. Ferney—stop! I entreat—I command you!" cried the Marquis of Eagledean, now suddenly rendered keenly alive to the dreadful consequences of exposure in respect to Lady Saxondale.

But the physician heard him not—or at least heeded him not: but precipitating himself in frantic haste down the stairs, he rushed forth from the house. The vehicle was still waiting at the door: he sprang into it—and gave a hurried direction to the driver, who at once whipped his horse; and away flew the cab in the direction of Park Lane.

The Marquis of Eagledean rushed down the stairs after the physician—but reached the threshold of the front door only in time to catch a glimpse of the vehicle as it was dashing away. For the driver, judging by Ferney's excitement, and knowing him to be a physician, conceived that some life and death affair was concerned: he accordingly failed not to ply his whip and chose not to spare his horse.

"Good heavens! my lord," said Thompson, who had followed the Marquis down to the street-door, "what will ensue? what will be the consequences?"

"My dear friend, what is all this?" cried Hawkshaw, now rushing forth from the parlour, where he had been waiting, and from the window of which he had observed the physician's egress—which had every appearance of a flight in wildest terror.

But Lord Eagledean could not answer either of his queries: he was overwhelmed with consternation at the thought that the fullest exposure must now inevitably take place,—and that all William Deveril's forbearance—all his hopes of saving his mother from shame and ruin—would in a few minutes become as naught. At that instant an unoccupied cab passed along the street; and the man who drove it, perceiving three gentlemen standing on the threshold of the hall-door, held up his hand in the usual mode of hailing for a fare.

"We may yet be in time to prevent it!" ejaculated the Marquis: and beckoning an affirmative to the cab-driver, he rushed down the steps.

Hawkshaw and Thompson followed him mechanically; and the next moment they were all three seated in the vehicle.

"Where to, gentlemen?" demanded the driver.

"To Saxondale House in Park Lane," was Lord Eagledean's hurried and excited response: then, as the vehicle drove rapidly away, he said to Hawkshaw, "My dear friend, whatever be the result of the present proceeding, it were wrong—it were ungenerous—to keep you in the dark as to its meaning: for Mr. Thompson, who is seated next to you, can tell you, even if my lips uttered it not, that William Deveril is the true and rightful Lord Saxondale!"

The Squire literally bounded upon his seat: but we must leave the Marquis to give him the few hurried explanations which the short space that was occupied in the drive to Park Lane permitted, while we transport the reader to Saxondale House itself.

CHAPTER CLXXI.

THE BIRTH-DAY.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon—about an hour previous to the scenes at Dr. Ferney's house—that several persons were assembled in the State Drawing-room at Saxondale House. These

were Lady Saxondale—Juliana—Edmund—Lord Harold Staunton—Lord Petersfield—and Messrs. Marlow and Malton.

This was the day on which, according to the baptismal certificate, the heir of Saxondale attained his twenty-first year!

It was therefore a day of business,—to be succeeded with festivities in the evening. The table in the State Drawing-room where the assemblage had gathered, was covered with parchments, deeds, and documents: the time had arrived when the guardianship of Lord Petersfield and Marlow and Malton was to terminate—when the requisite releases were to be signed by Edmund—and when the transfers of the Saxondale property were to be duly made by the trustees.

We must glance at the demeanour and bearing of those present on the occasion. First of all, Lady Saxondale, looking eminently handsome, wore upon her countenance a certain expression of satisfaction,—which Petersfield and the lawyers regarded as a becoming maternal pride in respect to the offspring who was now entering upon the enjoyment of his estates. The reader however will scarcely require to be informed, that this expression on her ladyship's features was rather one of triumph at the success of all her deeply laid schemes: for she had not the slightest fear that her own lawful and legitimate offspring—William Deveril—would breathe a syllable or raise a finger to prevent the consummation of the monstrous fraud by which he was excluded from his rights. Secondly, Edmund himself was in a fever of ecstatic joy: his dark crime was for the moment forgotten; and in the secret depths of his heart, he was thinking to himself that he should speedily again shake off the yoke which his mother had ever since the date of that foul deed succeeded in re-imposing upon him. Thirdly, Juliana looked on with an outward calmness—but with an inward exultation: for she had resolved that as the price of keeping the tremendous secret with which she was acquainted, she would extort from her mother a concession of a handsome income, which would enable her to prosecute her own pleasures after her own independent fashion. Fourthly, Lord Harold Staunton—who, as the reader is aware, knew nothing at all of the fearful deception which was being practised—had his own pleasurable feelings: for what with being Lady Saxondale's paramour, and having, as he fancied, obtained immense influence over Edmund, he saw every opportunity of continuing a life of luxurious indolence. Fifthly, Lord Petersfield looked so immensely pompous, and at the same time so awfully grave, that he seemed the very embodiment of the proudest diplomatic mystery; and if any one at the moment had dared to ask him point-blank whether he were really Lord Petersfield or not, he would doubtless have considered it his duty to fence with the question for at least half-an-hour ere he answered it. Sixthly, Mr. Marlow was all excitement and bustle—unfolding one paper and rolling up another—making a correction here, and a memorandum there—and, in short, appearing as brisk as if he were full of quicksilver. Seventhly, his partner Mr. Malton had all the sedate business-like demeanour of a shrewd and intelligent practitioner.

These seven personages were, as we have said, gathered round the table in the State Drawing-room at about four o'clock on the day of which we are writing. Business was now to be proceeded with—to be followed by a sumptuous banquet, which was ordered for seven o'clock. The attainment of a majority under such circumstances, where immense estates and revenues were concerned, was a matter of such importance as to absorb every other feeling on the part of such men as Petersfield and the lawyers. Thus, though they knew full well that Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton were much more intimate than they ought to be—though they likewise knew that Juliana's career had been far from the purest and most creditable—and though, in addition to these circumstances, they were equally aware that Edmund himself was a dissipated profligate—they did not consider the present moment to be the time to bestow cold looks, make pointed allusions, or display any particular fastidiousness on their own parts. In a word, they regarded it as a day on which the past might be put aside, for the present, and when every indulgence should be shown and every friendly feeling ought to prevail. Under these circumstances was it that those seven persons were assembled.

But just as Mr. Malton was beginning to read over the releases which Edmund had to sign, a domestic entered the room, and presented a card to Lady Saxondale—without however uttering a word. For a moment—but only for a moment—she turned pale and trembled: yet so quickly was her self-possession regained, that not a soul present observed that she had even for that single instant been thus shaken.

"I will come immediately," she said to the domestic—who bowed and retired: then addressing herself to the company, she observed with a bland smile, "It is a visitor of no consequence—but nevertheless one whom I must see for a few minutes. You can proceed, Mr. Marlow, with the reading of the release: as, for my part, I am already acquainted with its contents."

She then left the room. But scarcely had the door closed behind her—scarcely did she find herself on the landing—when she was seized with a recurrence of that tremor which was so transient in the presence of the company; and as a frightful idea swept like a barbed arrow through her brain, she murmured to herself, "My God! can he have thought better of it? can he have repented of the sacrifice he had promised to make? can he mean to assert his rights? No, no—it is impossible! He loves me too well to plunge me into ruin! I have too much influence over him for that! A little cajolery—plenty of caresses—a more than usual amount of endearments—and he will be docile—he will be submissive!"

Thus buoying herself up with hope—though nevertheless not without some degree of painful suspense and poignant apprehension—Lady Saxondale repaired to the apartment to which the visitor had been shown. This visitor was none other than William Deveril. Unaware that the Marquis of Eagledean had so suddenly come up to London, our hero—having some business in the metropolis—had journeyed thither; and having terminated it sooner than he had expected, he thought that he would pay his mother a visit of a few minutes ere hastening off to the railway-station to return to his own abode. We must

add that he was totally ignorant that this was the birthday of Saxondale's heir—*his own birthday, by rights*—but the benefits of which were to all appearances to be reaped by another!

Lady Saxondale entered, as we said, the apartment to which William Deveril had been shown; and with all the generous feelings of his heart—with all the enthusiastic fervour of a filial love which could even blind itself to a mother's faults—he rushed into her arms. In that gush of tenderness was the significant proof that she was safe, and that it was merely a casual visit which he had thus paid her—a visit inspired by no motive hostile to her own schemes.

"My dearest boy!" she said, clasping him to her bosom, and lavishing upon him caresses which appeared the tenderest and the most fervid: "I am delighted to see you again! Would that it were possible, my beloved William,"—for by this Christian name she was accustomed to call him,—"we could meet oftener! But for many reasons you know it is impossible."

"Alas! I know it, dearest mother," responded our hero: "and you will admit that I obey the dictates of my own feelings as little as possible. If I come to you once a month, it is the very outside——"

"You are indeed as prudent, dearest boy, as you are kind-hearted and generous towards your affectionate mother:"—and as she thus spoke, the wily woman pressed him again to her bosom. "I am so sorry, dearest William," she went on to observe, "that I have some persons on business with me at this moment: and I shall not be able to remain very long with you——"

"Never, my beloved mother," quickly responded our hero, "will I interfere with your proceedings! I will therefore depart at once—contented and happy to have embraced you; and the next time I call, perhaps you will have a little more time to devote to me."

"Rest assured that it shall be so," answered her ladyship. "But yet you shall not leave me in such a hurry. You know how I love you; and I cannot find it in my heart to hasten you away. Yes, dearest William—I love you all the more on account of your noble conduct towards me!"

"Oh! how often have I conjured you" exclaimed our hero, "not to express the slightest syllable of thanks on that account! It is a duty which I owe you; and being such, it is cheerfully performed."

"Dearest boy!" murmured Lady Saxondale, gazing upon him with every appearance of mingled tenderness and admiration. "And you are sure, William, that you have never once repented of the decision to which you came—that there have not been moments when you have regretted the sacrifice you have made——"

"Never once, mother!" cried Deveril emphatically. "No—not for a single moment!"

"And never," continued Lady Saxondale, "have you breathed in the ear of your wife——"

"No, never—not a syllable! That is the only secret which I have kept from Florina. In every other respect my heart is revealed to her as if my breast itself were transparent. Oh, dearest mother! if you entertain the slightest misgiving on my account, banish it from your mind—dismiss it from your thoughts! You may confide in my good faith as implicitly as if it were an angel from heaven that gave you the assurance!"

"And all the fondest love which a mother can bear for her son, is your's as your reward," murmured Lady Saxondale, as she bestowed upon him a parting embrace.

"Farewell, dearest mother," responded Deveril. "In a month we shall meet again."

They then separated,—Lady Saxondale returning with exultant heart to the State Drawing-room—and our hero descending the stairs to issue forth from the mansion. As he crossed the threshold of the front-door, he bade the hall-porter good afternoon: and that domestic sententiously replied, "Good afternoon, Mr. Deveril."

"Deveril?" ejaculated a middle-aged gentleman who, at the instant, having alighted from a vehicle, was hurrying up the steps. "Deveril! was that the name I heard mentioned?"—and he stopped short, surveying our hero rapidly, and also in a wildly excited manner.

"My name is Deveril, sir," was the response, courteously given—but likewise with some degree of astonishment at the singular behaviour of his interrogator.

"Yes—it must be!—the very age—the likeness too!" said that individual, in a quick musing tone to himself. "A word with you, if you please, sir—a word with you! It is of the highest importance! And yet, as you are here—at Saxondale House—you must know——But no matter! A word with you!"

"With me?" exclaimed our hero, in increasing astonishment.

"Yes—with you! Are you not William Deveril? I am Dr. Ferney—a physician whose name perhaps may not be altogether unknown to you. I have just seen the Marquis of Eagledean—and Mr. Hawkshaw——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Deveril: "is Mr. Hawkshaw in London?"

"He is. But there is another thing," Ferney went on to say, in the same hurried and excited manner: "a certain Mr. Thompson——"

"Thompson!" echoed Deveril, an intense interest now blending with his amazement.

"Yes! But we cannot converse here. Come with me!"—then addressing himself to the hall-porter, the physician said, "Have the kindness to show us to an apartment where we may converse for a few minutes."

The domestic hesitated not to comply with this command, inasmuch as the name of the eminent Ferney was well known to him: and moreover, Deveril himself was an occasional visitor at the mansion. He had caught, too, some portion of the hurried and ejaculatory exchange of observations which had just passed upon the door-steps; and without understanding anything in its true sense, he saw enough to be convinced that something of importance was progressing. He therefore conducted the physician and our hero into a parlour opening from the hall: but he paused to inquire of the former whether he should announce his presence to her ladyship?

"No—not yet!—do not disturb her for the moment!" ejaculated Ferney: and he seemed all in a nervous trepidation until the domestic retired, closing the door behind him: then, still with excited utterance, he said abruptly, "What are

you doing here? Tell me quick!—tell me, I beseech you!"

"I came to call upon Lady Saxondale," was our hero's response: and he could not feel offended by the physician's questioning: on the contrary, he himself was now excited and agitated at all that was passing.

"Lady Saxondale! Wherefore speak of her thus coldly?" exclaimed Ferney. "But you do *not* know——it is evident you do not! You are completely in the dark! Ah! it is for me to be the first to enlighten you!"

"Good heavens, what mean you?" cried Deveril, now trembling with apprehension lest the secret which but a few minutes back he had so solemnly pledged himself to his mother to keep, should have become known to the physician: then, as he recollected that the name of Thompson was mentioned on the door-steps, he felt assured that his conjecture must be the true one.

"What do I mean?" ejaculated the excited Ferney. "Here! strip off your coat—your waistcoat—unfasten your shirt——"

"Oh, my poor mother!" murmured Deveril, as he caught the physician violently by both arms, and forced him into a chair: for it was in a sort of frenzy that Ferney had begun almost to tear our hero's raiment from his back. "Silence! compose yourself—I conjure you to compose yourself! Whatever you may know, sir, must be kept inviolable!"

"Heavens! is it possible," cried Ferney, starting up in a still wilder excitement than before, "that you yourself *do* know everything, and that you have submitted thus to be defrauded of your rights?"

"Dr. Ferney," answered our hero, "on my knees do I supplicate your forbearance—your mercy towards my——towards Lady Saxondale!"

"Oh, speak out the words fully! call her *your mother!*" cried the physician.

"No, no—not aloud! the very walls have ears!" murmured Deveril, with tremor in his accents, and an almost frenzied affright in his looks: but as the physician was bounding towards the door, he sprang up from his knees—flew after him—and literally hurled him back. "Sir!" he exclaimed, with all the vehemence of passion, "it is not *your* secret which you seem so madly inclined to betray! it is *mine*—and I invoke curses upon your head if you dare reveal it!"

"Ah! young man," cried the physician, growing all the more rabid in his excitement in proportion as our hero's frenzy increased,—"you may indeed invoke curses upon me: for it is I—wretch, villain that I have been—who have proved the means of depriving you of your birth-right! But wrong shall be done you no more—everything shall be proclaimed in the face of day!"

"For God's sake, spare me—spare my mother!" cried Deveril, again falling upon his knees, and clasping his hands wildly, as his arms were outstretched towards the physician.

But Ferney heeded him not: and availing himself of the opportunity to rush to the door, he flung it open—he dashed into the hall, demanding of a footman, "Where is your mistress? Where, I ask?"—and he stamped his foot with impatience.

"In the drawing-room above, sir," responded the astounded lacquey. "But her ladyship——"

"No matter!" cried the physician: and he rushed up the stairs.

William Deveril, in a state bordering upon frenzy—maddened at the thought of the shame, the ruin, the total destruction, which must overtake his mother—darted in pursuit of Dr. Ferney; while the domestic and the hall-porter, who beheld this singular scene, exchanged looks of perfect bewilderment, being utterly at a loss what to think.

But we must now return to the State Drawing-room, to which Lady Saxondale went back after her interview with her son. She entered with the calm composure of one who had merely received a casual visitor, of whom she had succeeded in getting rid after some twenty minutes' conversation. She resumed her seat at the table,—motioning Mr. Marlow to continue the reading of the releases, to the end of which he had not yet got, as they were very long. He had paused for an instant out of respect for her ladyship, when she thus re-appeared; but on that sign from her, he continued the recital. Volatile, quick, and bustling, as his habits were,—he nevertheless could settle himself down on occasions into comparative sedateness; and he was now reading the details of the documents in that slow and deliberate manner which was best calculated to render the contents effective and impressive. In about ten minutes more after Lady Saxondale's return to the room, the reading was brought to an end; and then Mr. Marlow, addressing Edmund, spoke in the following manner:—

"Your lordship has heard all the details of these releases, which you are requested to sign not merely in acquittal of the trust which has been exercised on your behalf by my Lord Petersfield and the firm to which I have the honour to belong—but likewise in evidence of satisfaction at the mode in which that trust has been carried out. Here are the deeds which are about to be handed over to your lordship, and which will place you in full enjoyment of the domains and revenues whereunto you are entitled. Your lordship will have the goodness to sign these releases; and these papers are then yours."

Edmund took the pen which the solicitor presented to him, and was about to write the name of "SAXONDALE" on the parchment whose contents had just been read,—when Lord Petersfield, thinking it a proper opportunity for him to make a set speech, waved his hand in a dignified manner for a pause to ensue ere the business should be thus terminated.

"Permit me," he said, looking awfully solemn, and speaking with all the gravity of the veteran diplomatist,—"permit me as the friend of your long deceased father—as the friend of your family for many, many years—as one who has beholden you grow up from infancy to that manhood which you have now attained——And I think I may venture to assert that it is really you yourself whose growth I have thus studied; and not another's—permit me, I say, to congratulate you on the attainment of your majority—a majority which, I believe, I may add without any fear of contradiction, places you in the possession of your estates. I am not accustomed to make hurried assertions—I am not in the habit of speaking precipitately or rashly—but I think I may venture to affirm that you are the possessor of those estates—your idea-

dity is beyond dispute—and I was congratulating the legitimate, the lawful, the unmistakable—shall I say the well-proven-to-be heir of Saxondale?"

"No—it is false!" ejaculated a wildly speaking voice, as the door was dashed open; and Dr. Ferney, with the air of a lunatic just escaped from Bedlam, burst into the room, followed by William Deveril.

Lady Saxondale started up as if suddenly galvanised: a wild scream thrilled from her lips—and she sank senseless upon the floor. William Deveril, who had stopped short on beholding that assemblage of persons, sprang forward to catch his mother: but he was too late to prevent her from falling—and almost frantic, he snatched her up in his arms and conveyed her to a sofa.

At the same instant other hurried footsteps were heard upon the landing; and the Marquis of Eagledean, Mr. Hawkshaw, and Mr. Thompson now made their appearance upon the scene.

CHAPTER CLXXII.

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR OF SAXONDALE.

No words in the English language—nor in any known tongue—have power to convey even a faint idea of the excitement and confusion which were thus suddenly produced in that apartment. Lord Petersfield had merely dogmatised in his wonted sententious manner, without the slightest possible suspicion that while he was expatiating on Edmund's identity as the veritable heir of Saxondale, he was treading on the most ticklish ground, and that by a coincidence he was sending forth verbiage which admitted of so marked and abrupt a refutation. He sat aghast in his chair:—Malton, the sedate partner, looked astounded—Marlow, the volatile one, was all feverish excitement. Juliana comprehended that all was lost; and when Hawkshaw made his appearance, she abruptly fled from the room. Staunton was seized with an inconceivable bewilderment, which quickly became blended with a strong feeling of terror on beholding his uncle the Marquis of Eagledean. As for Edmund, he was stricken with amazement: but the next moment he felt assured that it could be nothing beyond a madman's freak. Of course he knew Ferney well,—having been a captive at the physician's house: but it was natural enough for him to conjecture that the doctor, instead of being fitted to take charge of lunatics, had become a lunatic himself.

Lady Saxondale had fainted, as we have already said: her son had borne her to a sofa—and sustaining her in his arms, was giving vent to ejaculations half frantic, half pathetic.

"Mother, dearest mother——No, no—I mean Lady Saxondale—open your eyes! Do look up at me! No harm shall befall you! It is not I who have done it—I will contradict everything that is said——mother——your ladyship——dearest——no, Lady Saxondale!——O God, I am mad! I am frenzied!"

"Ring for her ladyship's maids," exclaimed the volatile Marlow: and he was bounding towards the bell-pull, when the Marquis of Eagledean called him back.

"No, sir!" said his lordship: "you had better not! Enhance not this terrible exposure. Shut the door, Hawkshaw. Water!—let us throw water on her ladyship's countenance!"

"Oh, my lord!" cried Deveril, flinging a look of wild reproach upon the Marquis; "what have you done?"

"It is not I who have done it!" exclaimed Lord Eagledean. "Heaven itself ordained this to be the day of revelation, atonement, and retribution—the day on which injustice is to be proclaimed and justice done—the day on which imposture is to be unmasked and truth developed—the day, in fine, on which the rightful heir of Saxondale is to take possession of his own: and that heir is he who has hitherto borne the name of William Deveril!"

While giving utterance to these last words, Lord Eagledean swept his looks around upon all present; and the effect was startling indeed for those who were not hitherto in the secret. Lord Petersfield was more than ever struck with the conviction that one can never be sure of anything in this world; and he even began to tremble lest the next announcement to be made should be to the effect that he himself was not Lord Petersfield at all—that he was quite another person—John Noakes or Tom Stiles, as the case might be. Marlow poured forth a perfect volley of questions: Malton looked perfectly confounded. Lord Harold Staunton knew his uncle too well not to feel assured that he was speaking the truth; and moreover the startling announcement which had been made, cleared up in an instant the one mystery which he knew Lady Saxondale had always kept inviolably concealed from him. As for Edmund himself,—though we mention him last, heaven knows he was not the least interested in these strange and almost frightful proceedings!—*he* was now seized with the most torturing misgivings: he turned pale as death, and quivered like an aspen leaf as he lay back in his chair.

But while we are thus describing the effects produced by the Marquis of Eagledean's announcement, this nobleman himself had seized on a decanter of water which stood on a side-table where wine and cake had been placed; and he hastened to sprinkle some of it on Lady Saxondale's countenance. That countenance was marble-pale; and even before the water was thus sprinkled upon it, there were crystal drops there. They were tears—but not tears that had flowed from her own eyes: they had fallen from the lashes of her son as he bent in frenzy over her. She began to revive; and now our hero, utterly overcome by his own highly wrought—indeed, excruciating feelings—himself fell down in a dead swoon. Hawkshaw and Dr. Ferney hastened to bear him to another sofa in that spacious drawing-room; and the physician now literally tore his garments off his back,—the Squire mechanically assisting, under the impression that it was a necessary process to bring him back to life.

"There!" cried Ferney in a wild excited tone and with vehement gestures: "there is the mark—the proof of his birth!"

"Ah! but I," ejaculated Edmund, springing up to his feet from the chair in which he had lain back, "have also a mark like that!"

"I know it, sir!" was Ferney's quick response: "but this right hand of mine—wretch, villain that

I am!—this right hand of mine, sir," he repeated still more vehemently than before, "made that mark upon your shoulder!"

Ejaculations of astonishment burst from the lips of Lord Petersfield, the two solicitors, and Lord Harold Staunton: a wild cry of rage thrilled from the lips of Edmund; and they all gathered round the sofa on which the real Lord Saxondale was stretched in his deep swoon. Those ejaculations were repeated, as their eyes concentrated their glances upon that mark—a mark not so large as a sixpence, but perfectly defining the semblance of a strawberry. Then all those looks, being suddenly withdrawn from that focus, exchanged glances of wonderment with each other.

"My lord, spare me! I conjure you to spare me!" a voice was now heard to speak—a voice the low deep accents of which were filled with a tremendous anguish—a voice, in short, so changed from its natural tone that those on whose ears it fell, had to glance in the direction whence it came in order to assure themselves that it was really the voice of Lady Saxondale.

And her's in sooth it was. She had now recovered: she was sitting up on the sofa, the picture of blank dismay—the personification of indescribable despair.

"Madam," responded the Marquis of Eagledean, to whom that doleful—Oh! so doleful appeal was made; "it were the very refinement of cruelty to address you in words which should add to the tortures you now experience. I therefore hesitate not to proclaim that as much leniency shall be shown you as under circumstances can be manifested—not however so much for your own sake, as for that of your admirable son who would have made every sacrifice *for* you!"

"Tell me at once," cried Edmund, flying towards Lady Saxondale with a fierce—a maddened—a diabolic expression of countenance,—"tell me, is this true? Am I not your son?"—and he seized *her* forcibly by the wrist, literally shaking her in the furious convulsion of his rage.

Her ladyship, though crushed down to the very earth—though trampled upon, as it were, by the iron heel of the sternest calamity—though overwhelmed with the ruins of that fabric of iniquity which had suddenly crumbled in upon her,—nevertheless at the instant experienced one single feeling of satisfaction,—which was that if she herself were utterly discomfited, the same fate had at least overtaken the ill-conditioned wretch whom she had hitherto called her son—the viper whom she had nourished to sting her! For a moment her large dark eyes glistened with that expression of malignant satisfaction as she forcibly tore her arm away from his grasp; and she was about to give utterance to some bitter retort, when the horrifying idea flashed to her mind that if she goaded Edmund to desperation, he might—in a paroxysm of rage and vindictiveness—or in the cruel bewilderment of his feelings, proclaim the murder of Adelaide, and that Lady Saxondale was the instigatrix! She accordingly exercised a sudden control over herself; and assuming an air of the profoundest commiseration, said, "Poor boy! it will be better that you and I should have a few minutes' discourse together."

The Marquis of Eagledean knew nothing particularly to the detriment of Edmund, beyond the profligacy of his morals; and the generous nobleman could not help experiencing a certain degree of compassion for the young man who was thus all in a moment hurled from the pinnacle of rank and wealth into the depth of obscurity and dependence. With this sympathetic feeling, he naturally considered it best that whatsoever explanations had to be given between that woman who had brought up another person's child as her own, and that young man on whom had come, like a thunderbolt, the tremendous announcement that he was *not* the son of her whom he had hitherto regarded as his mother—the Marquis thought, we say, that such explanations ought to take place between them alone together.

He therefore said, "Sir, compose your feelings as well as you are able—trust to the generosity of those who perhaps entertain some little sympathy on your behalf—and I think that I may safely promise you shall not be left altogether uncared for. Lady Saxondale, take him to another room: speak to him there—do, as indeed you ought, your best to comfort and console him; and in the meantime I will consult with those who are here upon the course which is to be adopted, so that for your son's sake,"—and he glanced towards the sofa where the real Lord Saxondale was only just beginning to recover from his deep swoon,—"it shall be measured with as much regard to your feelings as the circumstances will permit."

Edmund,—for so we had better continue to call him, though that was not really the Christian name which he had received at his birth from his mother, Madge Somers,—had not spoken another word after Lady Saxondale had addressed him with that air of seeming compassion. Pale as a ghost, he had stood riveted to the spot—no longer able to shut his eyes to the conviction that everything was indeed at an end so far as rank and riches were associated with himself. The blow was fearful—the shock tremendous: any other mind would probably have gone stark staring mad, and shrieked out in the wildness of delirium. But it was not so with Edmund Somers: he seemed to be reduced to an unnatural and incomprehensible state of being: he gasped for breath—he looked as if gazing upon a horrible spectre that had suddenly sprung up before him; and yet the light that shone in the depths of his eyes, was of a sinister and undefinable description.

"Come, Edmund," said Lady Saxondale, still in that low plaintive voice with which she had previously addressed him: "come—let us in all things follow the counsel of the Marquis of Eagledean: for to him have we both now to look for much that will influence our positions—indeed the future of our lives!"

She took the young man's hand; and he suffered himself mechanically to be led from the room. Not a word was spoken by those who remained behind, as they thus went forth: Dr. Ferney, not daring to throw another glance upon Lady Saxondale, was intent upon recovering our young hero from his swoon. Her ladyship conducted Edmund to her own boudoir,—this being an apartment remote from that which they had just left, and having double doors that would prevent the possibility of anything which might pass between them being caught up by an eavesdropper: for she well knew that the domestics

MARY-ANNE, THE LADY'S-MAID.

must already suspect that something strange was going on—and she likewise apprehended that the scene with Edmund Somers would be far from an agreeable one. She had however a fearful interest in soothing and tranquilizing him, if possible: she had to prevent him, as already hinted, from revealing in rage or despair—in bewilderment or in madness—the tremendous secret connected with the death of Adelaide.

Edmund had suffered himself to be led up to that boudoir: he had walked like an animated statue, neither looking to the right nor to the left: his hand merely lay in that of Lady Saxondale, but clasped it not. Yet all the while there was still that sinister and incomprehensible light playing in the depths of his eyes.

They were now in the boudoir. Her ladyship had taken the precaution to lock the outer door, and to close securely the inner one, which was covered with scarlet cloth. She made Edmund sit down upon a chair: she took another opposite to him; and now their eyes met. That woman who had reared him as her son, looked him in the face: that young man who had hitherto believed her to be his mother, looked also in the face the woman who was *not* his mother! She beheld the ominous light in his eyes; and for an instant a cold shudder passed through her form—that form which within the last ten minutes had been racked and rent, lacerated and tortured, agonized and crucified, with the most fearful feelings that could possibly be diffused through a human frame from the sources of the soul.

"Edmund," she said, still preserving that low plaintiveness of tone; and now forcing herself to become almost a suppliant at his very feet—though in her heart she longed to call him "viper," as she had often before done, and give way to a wild maniac joy at the thought that in her own fall she had dragged down along with her the

youth who had so frequently rebelled against her; —"Edmund," she said, "for heaven's sake look not thus upon me! It is a fearful moment for us both: but if you suffer, I suffer likewise. You ought not to be irritated against me: it is not my fault if these plans—the work, the labour, and the toil of long, long years—have all exploded in an instant. Through me you would have had rank and riches: to me you would have been indebted for the proudest of positions. Think of all I have undergone for your sake—the warrings by day, the agonies by night——"

"Enough of this!" suddenly ejaculated the young man, springing up to his feet. "Tell me," he demanded in a hoarse thick voice, "whose son I really am."

"Do not ask me!" responded Lady Saxondale, in an imploring voice: for she was frightened by his looks and his manner. "It is needless to enter into particulars——"

"Needless? No!" interrupted Edmund, with a sort of dogged resoluteness, which afforded still farther proof that he was in a most unnatural state of mind. "Tell me, I repeat, whose son I am! If some beggar's brat when you adopted me—or bought me—or stole me, whichever it were,—at all events let me know the worst. Tell me then who I am! There is something horrible and hideous to be ignorant of one's parentage. Tell me who I am. Think not that by lifting the veil and making me aware that I owe my existence to some low-born wretches, you can inflict a sterner blow than that which has already struck me. Tell me, I say, who I am!"—and he spoke in a manner such as never he had spoken in before.

"Edmund! Edmund!" murmured Lady Saxondale, not knowing what to think—whether he were in that state of ominously unnatural calm which precedes the sudden explosion of the volcano—or whether the force of circumstances had made his mind put forth powers which it had never hitherto developed, but which were now coming to his aid to enable him to meet his present position with the true courage of a man;—"Edmund, Edmund, press me not upon this point, I conjure you! Let us talk upon other subjects! I will not abandon you—my own son will give me riches—you shall share them——"

"The name of my parents!" interrupted Edmund, still in that hoarse thick voice, but with a more lurid flashing of the sinister eyes. "What was it?"

"Your father died before you were born," answered Lady Saxondale, terrified into giving this response. "He left your mother on the eve of her confinement, in destitution——"

"And that mother—who was she? Name her!" exclaimed Edmund, seeing that Lady Saxondale hesitated. "At least let me know my mother's name!"

"Margaret Somers," answered Lady Saxondale, her soul shrinking within her.

"Somers?" ejaculated Edmund: and for a few moments he reflected in a strange bewildered manner. "I have heard that name before——Margaret Somers!——Why, good God! *Madge* is short for *Margaret!*——That was the name of her who died some time ago, at the house of him who this day has proved to be your son——And by the description of her, she was the same that I saw——Eternal heavens! I comprehend it all! ——Yes, yes, it is clear as daylight!"—and in a moment the young man became violently excited.

"Edmund, Edmund!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, almost wild with alarm.

"Oh! my own mother was she in whose way I fell that time!" he continued to cry forth, in allusion to his meeting with Madge Somers in the miserable hut near the Hornsey Wood Tavern, when he was in search of Angela, but when he subsequently fell in with Emily Archer. "Yes—yes—my own mother—that horrible looking wretch——God forgive me for saying so! But it is too dreadful to think that she *was* my mother!"—and the miserable young man sank upon a chair, covering his face with his hands, and weeping bitterly with mingled rage, and shame, and anguish.

Lady Saxondale knew full well to what woman he had alluded: because Madge Somers had told her, the first time she ever called upon her in Park Lane, how she had encountered Edmund, and how she had recognised him to be her own son. Now that her ladyship beheld the young man weeping thus bitterly and plunged into grief, the terror with which he had a few moments back inspired her, turned into a sort of satisfaction—or was at all events relieved; because she flattered herself that she could once more exercise omnipotent sway over him, and prevent him from giving vent either in rage or frenzy to the fearful secret of the murder in the Trent. But all of a sudden Edmund dashed away his tears; and starting up, he bent his eyes upon Lady Saxondale with a renewal of that sinister expression which had before filled her soul with vague, nameless, shapeless terrors; and in a voice that was hoarse and deep, he said, "So that woman was my mother? Oh! better that *you* were my mother than *she*—much as I hate you!"

"Hate me, Edmund?"—and Lady Saxondale again quivered all over, and again felt as if she would never pass through this frightful ordeal.

"Yes—hate you!" repeated the young man, with accents so vehement and looks so sinister that it was impossible to doubt the truth of his assertion. "What reason have I for loving you?—but have I not every cause to detest you? Why did you take me from my mother in mine infancy, to bring me up to believe myself that which I am not? —why did you cradle me in down, only that I might be flung back again upon rags?—why did you make me eat off plate of silver and of gold, only that I might be thrown back on the sorriest crust? But this is not all! Why did you,"—and here he ground his teeth with the pent-up fury of his concentrated rage,—"why did you teach me to become criminal? Why, woman—why did you make me a murderer?"

And the last words came hissing from his lips as if borne on the panting breath of a reptile.

"Edmund, Edmund!" exclaimed her ladyship: "wherefore go on thus? You throw all the blame on me——"

"On you?" he vociferated fiercely. "On whom would you that I should accumulate it? Detestable woman that you are! I hate you—and——"

"And what, Edmund!" almost screamed forth Lady Saxondale, as the most awful terrors filled her soul and the frightfulest visions swept like a desolating hurricane through her imagination,—

the avowal of the murder from his lips—the summoning of the police—Newgate—the Old Bailey—the black cap on the judge's head—the sentence of death—the gibbet—the crowd—the tolling bell—the chaplain's prayer—the halter—and the drop!

"And what? you ask me," he cried, his countenance suddenly expressing a fury that was frenzied and terrible. "This!"—and snatching up from the toilet-table a knife which lay there, he made one tiger-like spring at Lady Saxondale.

"No! no! Spare me!—in mercy spare me!" she shrieked out, flying towards the door.

"Wretch! you shall die!" thundered forth Edmund: and at the same instant he seized upon her.

She turned to battle for her life—while her piercing screams echoed through the house: but her foot tripped—and as she fell, the infuriate Edmund plunged the knife into her bosom. Her rending screams suddenly closed in an awful gasping moan: the young man drew forth the knife from her bosom—and with a wild cry of mingled triumph, rage, and desperation, he plunged it into his own breast. He fell down heavily close where Lady Saxondale herself had fallen; and for a few moments there was a dead silence in that room. But only for a few moments: for the door, which her ladyship had locked, was burst open—and in rushed the Marquis of Eagledean, Hawkshaw, Thompson, and the two lawyers,—Lord Petersfield almost immediately bringing up the rear. Then what a horrifying spectacle met their eyes!

But where was Dr. Ferney? The true and rightful Lord Saxondale had recovered from his swoon—but only to rave in the delirium of fever. He had been borne to a bed-chamber; and the physician was there, in attendance upon him.

And where was Lord Harold Staunton? A few words will suffice to inform the reader. The moment after Lady Saxondale had quitted the State Drawing-room, leading the discomfited and ruined Edmund away, the Marquis of Eagledean had imperiously beckoned Lord Harold to the farther extremity of the apartment; and had there addressed him in the following terms:—

"I have long known that you were steeped to the very lips in profligacies, and that towards myself you have at times harboured the most diabolical intentions. But it is only this day I have learnt the full extent of your iniquity; and that you are—my blood turns cold as I speak it——a murderer!"

Lord Harold staggered back with a countenance ghastly pale, and his eyes fixed in horrified dismay upon his uncle.

"Yes," continued the Marquis; "heaven has decreed that your guilt shall become known—and the waters of the Trent have given up their secrets as evidence against you. Speak not—but hear me! For the sake of the family to which you so unfortunately belong—for the sake of your admirable sister Florina—and for the sake of her husband, that excellent young man, always so noble in nature, now ennobled in name—and who by marriage has become connected with yourself,—for all these reasons the veil of secrecy will be thrown over your enormities. But depart hence! lose no time in leaving the kingdom! fly to some far-off land!—and thence write to let me know where you are, so that just sufficient for a subsistence may henceforth be allowed you. Depart, sir! Not a word! not a syllable!"

Lord Harold Staunton, mentally and morally stricken down to the very dust—though just physically able to drag himself forth from the room—obeyed his uncle's mandate; and in a few moments he quitted Saxondale House—for ever!

But to return to the boudoir. We will not pause to depict the horror, the consternation, and the dismay which seized upon those who burst into that room where the frightful tragedy had taken place. Suffice it to say that prompt assistance was rendered—that Ferney was sent for from Lord Saxondale's chamber—and that when he came, he pronounced life to be extinct in the form of Edmund, but that the vital spark yet remained in that of Lady Saxondale. Profoundly afflicted was the physician—anguish-stricken as well as conscience-smitten—at all that was taking place—at all that *had* taken place; and so overcome with his feelings was he, that it was found necessary for him to be conveyed to his own home, under the charge of the grateful and attached Thompson.

Fresh medical men were sent for—some to devote themselves to the care of Lord Saxondale—others to that of her ladyship. The Marquis of Eagledean sent a message to Juliana, who had locked herself up in her own room, and whose ears the anguished cries of her mother had not reached. She complied with his summons; and he acquainted her with the fearful tragedy that had occurred. She simulated much more feeling than it was in her nature veritably to experience; and the Marquis said to her, "It is for you to watch day and night by your mother's side, so that should she recover—of which the medical men give some hope—she may receive from your lips the assurance that the utmost mercy shall be shown her, and that the veil shall be kept drawn over the darkest passages of her past history. For she has committed deeds, of which I hope and trust—as indeed I believe—that you can have no knowledge; and it is for you to prevent the ears of menials from catching the first words which may fall from her lips when the faculty of speech returns. Do you comprehend me?"

"I do, my lord," answered Juliana; "and I will faithfully obey your instructions."

The Marquis of Eagledean,—who, notwithstanding all the excitement of the scenes, blended with horror too, which characterized this memorable day, preserved his self-possession and his wonted clearness of head,—now set off back again into Kent, to break to Florina the twofold intelligence that her husband was the rightful Lord Saxondale, but that he had been seized with a severe illness. The young lady, half frantic at the latter announcement, insisted upon repairing at once to London, to minister to her beloved husband. This the Marquis had foreseen; and he had a post-chaise-and-four in readiness for the purpose. He despatched by messenger a hasty note to his wife, the Marchioness of Eagledean, to acquaint her with all that had happened,—while he himself, with his usual indomitable energy which rendered him insensible of fatigue, accompanied Florina to London. During the journey he broke to her the circumstances which as yet he had left untold: namely, those of the fearful tragedy. Florina was horrified to a degree: but in respect

to her husband the Marquis assured her that she had no serious cause for apprehension, as his illness was merely the result of the overwrought excitement which he had experienced, and that in a few days he would be convalescent.

Pass we over those few days; and let us say that a week had elapsed since the memorable incidents which we have been chronicling. In the meantime there had been an inquest on the body of Edmund; and from the situation in which his own corpse and Lady Saxondale's inanimate form were found in the boudoir,—coupled with the circumstance that her rending shrieks had alarmed the household,—the jury had no difficulty in coming to the decision that the young man had perished by his own hand, after having endeavoured to murder her ladyship. It was of course necessary that in the depositions made at this inquest, the imposture palmed off upon the world by Lady Saxondale in respect to Edmund, and to the prejudice of the rightful heir, should be fully described; and the report of that inquest, through the medium of the newspapers, gave this much of the astounding narrative to the public. The verdict of the jury included an expression of their belief that the deceased young man, considering all the circumstances, could not have been in a sound state of mind—but that he must have been goaded to frenzy when he perpetrated his double crime: and thus this humane view of the case forbade not his interment with Christian ceremonies. The funeral was a plain and simple one—very different indeed from what it would have been, with all appropriate pomp and splendour, if he had died in possession of that title which for twenty-one years he had unconsciously usurped!

The rightful Lord Saxondale continued under the influence of fever for an entire week; and it was not until the expiration of this interval, that he became possessed of his reasoning faculties. Then he recognised the beloved wife of his bosom—the charming and beautiful Florina—who had unwearyingly ministered to him during his illness: but when he began to question her relative to his mother, she was careful not to inform him of the horrible tragedy which had taken place. She merely suffered him to understand that her ladyship was ill and confined to her own chamber: but she gave her husband as much hope as she dared—and perhaps even more, in order to tranquillise him—that this illness of Lady Saxondale's would result in convalescence.

It was not however so. Her ladyship recovered her own consciousness at about the same time as her son regained his in another chamber beneath the same roof. But the wound she had received, though not mortal in itself, was evidently leading to fatal results; and as her last hour drew near, the wretched woman, profoundly conscience-stricken, sought to make all possible atonement for her crimes by a full and complete confession. The Marquis of Eagledean was selected by her as the recipient of these revelations; and one afternoon—about ten days having now elapsed from the date of the tragedy—his lordship found himself seated by the bedside of the dying lady to hear from her lips the narrative of the past. Juliana had been requested to leave the room; and in a feeble voice—in broken language, and with many self-interruptions—Lady Saxondale was enabled to furnish sufficient details for the Marquis to obtain a clear and precise insight into those facts which were previously altogether unknown to him, or which were but dimly outlined to his knowledge.

CHAPTER CLXXIII.

HISTORY OF THE PAST.

THE reader will remember how great were the affliction and dismay which seized upon the old Lord Saxondale and his young wife Harriet, as well as upon the entire household at the castle in Lincolnshire, when the intelligence came upon them like a thunderbolt that the infant son and heir was stolen from its nurse's arms. At first her ladyship was really inclined to believe that Ralph Farefield—who she had no doubt was at the bottom of it—purposed to retain the child in some place of concealment, in order to bring his uncle to terms. But this hope wore off in a few hours; and when she was enabled deliberately and seriously to calculate how much Ralph had to gain by the child's death, she could not blind herself to the conviction that her infant son's murder was an extremity but too certain to be adopted by Farefield,—the risk of discovery being worth running on the one hand, considering the immensity of the stake to be played for on the other. The reader is aware that Lady Saxondale possessed a mind beyond the standard strength of her sex's energies; and thus her resolve was speedily taken. She represented to her husband that it would be advisable for her to repair to London, under an assumed name, and secretly institute inquiries into Ralph Farefield's recent movements, or act otherwise as circumstances should suggest. The old lord consented; and her ladyship proceeded to the metropolis, accompanied by her principal tire-woman, Mabel Stewart. This Mabel was about thirty years of age—discreet, prudent, and cool-headed—and one in whom her ladyship fancied she could put the utmost trust.

Taking the name of Smith, Lady Saxondale hired lodgings in a respectable house in Islington. This house was occupied by a widow lady named Ferney, whose son had recently commenced practice as a surgeon. The worthy woman had so impoverished herself in order to afford her son the means of completing his professional education, that when the front parlour was converted into a surgery, and the back one into a receiving-room for patients, the expenses incurred thereby left serious embarassments behind. Of course Mr. Ferney did not at once reap any considerable fruits from his hard studies; and while there were no incomings on the one hand, yet on the other the debts had to be paid—a certain appearance had to be kept up—he and his mother had to live. The house was larger than was necessary for so small a family—it was well furnished—and though with considerable reluctance, they were compelled to put up a bill announcing the drawing-room floor to let. Lady Saxondale needed lodgings, and also needed the aid of a surgeon in carrying out her design. She saw the bill in the window: she was struck

by the coincidence that her two requirements might be afforded beneath one and the same roof; and shrewd as she was, she had no difficulty in reading the circumstances of the people of the house. A struggling medical man—an impoverished mother—and thence the necessity for letting lodgings! She entered the house: she was then in all the bloom of her beauty—and her quick eye showed her in an instant that the pale pensive young surgeon, whom she found seated with his mother, was struck by admiration at her appearance. This, then, was the very place for Lady Saxondale; and, as Mrs. Smith, she became the occupant of the drawing-room floor. In order at once to ingratiate herself with the mistress of the house, she took the floor for a year, paying the entire rent in advance; and this godsend suddenly rescued the Ferneys from the serious embarrassments and apprehensions under which they had been recently labouring.

Lady Saxondale did not let the grass grow under her feet. On leaving Lincolnshire she had not the slightest intention in reality of troubling herself or wasting time about Ralph Farefield's proceedings: her plan was already settled: she was resolved to obtain some poor person's child, and represent it as her own lost infant son. For she argued to herself that if Farefield had not really made away with her little Edmund and should hereafter produce him, the heir would in this case be restored; and Ralph would be too glad to hush up the whole matter without seeking to punish her for a fraud and imposture—because she in her turn could punish him for the theft of her son. But, on the other hand, if he had really murdered that son—which she felt convinced he had—he would not dare proclaim that the supposititious one whom she purposed to palm off, was *not* her own child; for if he did, it would be tantamount to confessing himself the murderer of the true, rightful, and lawful one. Therefore, in either case, the astute Lady Saxondale saw that she would be perfectly safe, and that in the long run Ralph Farefield must inevitably be outwitted. She made a confidante of Mabel; and scarcely were they installed in their lodgings at the Ferneys' house, than the faithful domestic was despatched into the streets of London and to the poorer neighbourhoods, in search of such a child as by age and appearance would answer the required purpose.

Lady Saxondale was a well-read woman; and in the course of her reading she had stumbled upon a book containing many curious narratives relative to the uncertainty of circumstantial evidence, and the fallibility of human judgments when trusting thereto. One history in particular had struck her—a history that is doubtless familiar to many of our readers; namely, that of Martin Guerre. The circumstances of this remarkable story may be shortly summed up. Martin Guerre, a Frenchman, took leave of his wife to embark on a speculative voyage to the Mediterranean. Years elapsed—and he returned not; so that the wife believed herself to be a widow. But at length the inhabitants of her native place were one day startled by the intelligence that Martin Guerre had come back, and that happiness had re-entered his long deserted and desolate home. The neighbours flocked in to congratulate the husband and wife who were thus restored to each other; and the tale of the former was simply that he had been a prisoner for years amongst the Algerines. Time passed on; and again, one day, were the inhabitants of the town startled by the intelligence that another Martin Guerre had just made his appearance. Again, too, were there crowds at the house; and immense was the surprise of the neighbours on finding that the two Martin Guerres were as like each other as if they were twin-brothers. The wife was herself utterly unable to decide between the claims of the two; and an appeal was made to the law-tribunals to decide betwixt them. The tale told by the last-coming Martin Guerre, was that he had been in slavery, where he had fallen in with his litigant rival; and that as their personal appearance presented a remarkable similitude, a great friendship sprang up between them. He went on to say that he freely unbosomed all his family secrets to his friend,—which would account for this latter being enabled to speak to the wife upon circumstances which she would naturally suppose known only to herself and to her husband. Finally, the plaintiff informed the court that his rival had managed to escape before him; and that it was evident he had basely availed himself of these extraordinary circumstances to gain possession of a comfortable home and a handsome wife—both belonging to another. Then came the most remarkable features in this trial. The plaintiff showed certain spots upon his body, which the wife proved to have marked her first husband: but to the wonder of the court the defendant exhibited marks precisely similar! However, it was finally ascertained that the plaintiff—namely, the last-coming Martin Guerre—was the true one, and that the other was a base impostor who had usurped his rights. The latter subsequently confessed that a skilful surgeon's hands had created upon his person the very marks which so closely resembled those on the body of the real Martin Guerre, and which the impostor had during a series of years frequent opportunity of observing when they worked together half naked on the fortifications or in the arsenals of Algiers.

This was the history which had made an impression on the mind of Lady Saxondale, and which flashed to her recollection with strangely suggestive impulses at the moment she was in bitterness bewailing the loss of her son. The hand of a skilful surgeon had created divers marks of a particular nature, and all according to a description given from mere memory, on the back and shoulders of Martin Guerre's rival: and could not another surgical hand create the *one* mark which was needed on the neck of an infant as a proof of its identity with the lost heir of Saxondale? But while Mabel was looking after a child, Lady Saxondale herself was doing her best, not merely to ascertain the degree of intelligence possessed by the pale pensive surgeon, but also to make an impression upon his heart. Though too proud to be beguiled into weakness or frailty by actual sentiment, there was nevertheless nothing to which she would not stoop, if necessary, in order to accomplish those aims that were to outwit Ralph Farefield, and secure to herself a paramount ascendancy in the Saxondale family during the long minority which, considering the old lord's age, an heir might have to pass through after his death. She did her best to ingratiate herself with the widow Ferney—

made her presents, but in the most delicate manner—and, under pretence of adding to her own comforts, purchased a quantity of new things, in the shape of plate, china, and furniture, which in an apparently casual manner she gave the widow to understand she should leave behind when her term was up. Her excuse for being in London was a Chancery suit; and she alleged herself to be the widow of a rich country squire in the north of England. She soon discovered that the surgeon was a man of extraordinary talent—that he was devoted to his profession—that he had made it his study by day and by night—and that he had submitted to almost incredible privations in order to purchase "subjects" (in other parlance, dead bodies) at different times to forward his anatomical practice. The more Lady Saxondale saw of him, the more was she convinced that she could model him to her purpose. He had a laboratory fitted up in the house—and she affected the deepest interest in his experiments. Ferney was delighted: he believed that this interest was genuine: for he was simple-minded, honest, and credulous—a man of wonderful intellect in one sense and of profound ignorance in another—intelligent only in all that related to the objects of his studies, but ignorant as a mere child in the ways of the world and in the workings of the human heart. In less than a week he was completely infatuated with his mother's beautiful lodger. With him, indeed, it was love at first sight; and the passion thus gained ground so rapidly from the circumstance that its object seemed to display such deep interest in the very matters which so profoundly interested himself. Though she was careful at first not to manifest anything bordering on an indelicate forwardness by accompanying him to his laboratory, yet of an evening she would visit the sitting-room occupied by his mother and himself; and while the old lady dosed in her arm-chair, she would turn the conversation upon the enthusiastic surgeon's experiments—asking questions—listening with apparent delight to his explanations—and, with her own ready intelligence, proving that she fully comprehended them. It was a dangerous position for a young man, whose unsophisticated heart had no defences afforded by worldly experience against the wiles of a beautiful woman,—a dangerous position, we say, for him to be placed in; and, unconsciously as it were, he abandoned himself to the growing infatuation.

Within the first week after the arrival in London, chance threw Mabel Stewart in the way of Margaret Somers—a widow with an infant child, the father of which had died ere it was born. The woman—who, as well as the babe, was wrapped in the rags of beggary—asked alms of Mabel Stewart. She contemplated the child attentively; and in so doing, observed that it had a little mole between the neck and the shoulder, almost in the very place where the strawberry appeared upon the lost heir of Saxondale. Affecting to be deeply touched with the woman's tale, she gave her some silver, and bade her call on the following day at the house in Islington, "when perhaps something more would be done for her." Madge Somers did call—and saw Lady Saxondale, who at once felt assured that the child, by its appearance, would answer her purpose. She treated Madge Somers with the utmost kindness—gave her money and clothes—and bade her return in a day or two She then redoubled her wiles in respect to Ferney—but so artfully, as not to transgress the bounds of modesty nor actual propriety. And *now*, too, she hinted that she should feel pleased in the inspection of his laboratory,—choosing for the opportunity a morning when Mrs. Ferney was absent for a few hours on a visit to some friends. When there, alone with the surgeon, she bent over crucibles and retorts, examined phials and glasses, witnessed experiments, and even practised some,—all the while fanning his passion with the thousand and one arts which a skilful woman of the world knows so well how to carry into effect. In a moment of irresistible infatuation, Ferney cast himself at her feet, vowing that he was her slave. She gave him encouragement—but still in a manner that was calculated only to render him more completely submissive to her will. Availing herself of this opportunity, she turned the discourse gradually away from purely chemical experiments—questioned him on surgical matters—and gradually advanced towards the topic which she was anxious to broach. The unsuspicious Ferney,—while expatiating on the subject,—assured her that he would undertake to create almost any marks resembling natural ones on the person of an infant. But it is not necessary to dwell upon this point of the narrative, nor to extend the details of those means by which Lady Saxondale led Ferney to promise that he would give her a proof of his skill in this particular respect. Madge Somers came again; and Lady Saxondale now played off the artillery of her wiles upon this woman. She invented some story to account for her desire of possessing herself of a child whom she would adopt as her own and bring up in affluence. The bribe offered, was a large one; and Madge Somers had been dragged through the mire of too much misery and suffering, and too many low scenes, to have much good principle left: but still she had the natural love of a mother for her offspring. Nevertheless, she consented to part with it; and leaving the child, she went away with a heavy purse in her pocket.

The widow Ferney was under too many obligations to Mrs. Smith (as Lady Saxondale called herself) to ask impertinent questions, or to exhibit an inconvenient degree of curiosity: while the surgeon was too infatuated with the beautiful lodger, and too callous in respect to proceedings which did not concern himself, to pay any particular attention to this freak of the child being left at the house: for Lady Saxondale was careful not to let it transpire that she had purchased it, and that its mother had left it for good. Ferney was easily induced to practise his skill upon the infant; and Lady Saxondale, as if quite in a casual manner, and also as if catching at the first whimsical thought which entered her head, expressed her wonder whether he could convert the mole into the form of a strawberry. He declared that he could. Then she began to define specifications in respect to the actual size, shape, and appearance which this strawberry-mark was to take—all, she said with laughing cajolery, to put his skill the more severely to the test. He undertook to gratify what he regarded as her caprice—and with all the less hesitation because the operation would be attended with little

pain to the child, and thus his natural humanity would not be shocked. It was done: and Lady Saxondale experienced a glow of inward triumph when she perceived upon the neck of the babe a mark so closely resembling that with which her own son was born, that she felt convinced it would deceive the medical man and the nurse who had seen the lost heir at his birth. And now, too, she could fully comprehend the exact truth of all the details in the history of Martin Guerre.

But it was necessary to remain in London until the mark itself should be completely healed up; and from time to time she wrote cheering and encouraging letters to her husband in Lincolnshire, as described in one of the opening chapters of this narrative. Days grew into weeks; and during this interval Lady Saxondale continued to encourage, without however seeming to do so, the infatuation of the surgeon's passion. But as the widow did not again leave the house for more than half-an-hour at a time, Lady Saxondale was too cautious to enter the laboratory again: she did not choose to do aught to excite the woman's suspicions—and she had induced Ferney to keep the surgical proceeding of the strawberry-mark profoundly secret from his mother. This he readily promised; and so completely was he under the empire of Lady Saxondale, that it was not difficult for her to obtain from him another pledge—namely, that he would never mention the circumstance at all. But in his calmer moments, thoughts—dim, vague, and shapeless suspicions—would steal into the surgeon's mind that he was involved in some mystery which he could not comprehend—that there was a meaning and a purpose in the proceeding of the strawberry-mark—and that it was not a mere whim on the lady's part, nor a mere test of his skill. A secret voice whispered in his soul that he had been unconsciously drawn into a complicity with something which he could not comprehend—that Mrs. Smith was more than she seemed—that rank, and distinction, and a haughtier name, were probably veiled under the common-place appellation of Mrs. Smith. But when he again found himself in her presence, all his scruples and suspicions vanished—he seemed to live only for her—he rejoiced in having been enabled to do aught to serve her, either in the ministering to a mere whim or in the furtherance of some deeper and more important end.

But if Lady Saxondale visited the laboratory no more, she nevertheless regularly passed the evenings in the sitting-room of the widow and her son: or else she had them to tea in her own apartment. While the old lady dozed, or actually slept soundly in her arm-chair, the wily Harriet Saxondale practised all her arts to enslave the surgeon so completely that when she should be gone, her image might remain on his soul, to render him faithful to his pledges of secrecy. She exhibited an unwearying interest in his experiments—she learnt his receipts—and amongst them, was one for a certain composition, or elimination, of which he was in reality the discoverer, but which has only within the last few years been known to the world under the name of *Choloform*. Thus a month from the date of the arrival in London was drawing to a close: the mark was completely healed—and Lady Saxondale was thinking of getting back to Lincolnshire, when a circumstance occurred which for a moment threatened all her plans with utter annihilation. One evening Madg Somers made her appearance at the house; and as Lady Saxondale was taking tea with the Ferneys in their own apartment, the woman made straight for Mabel Stewart's chamber—which she knew. Mabel was at the moment undressing the babe; and she was taken so completely aback—indeed, was so utterly confounded by the suddenness with which Margaret Somers burst in upon her—that she had not time to cover up the mark that had been made on the infant's shoulder. Madge, impelled by motherly affection, sprang forward to snatch up the child and embrace it—when she caught sight of that mark. She was now confounded in her turn; and Lady Saxondale, having been informed by the servant of the house "that Mrs. Somers had come to fetch away the babe which Mrs. Smith had been so kindly keeping for a little while," hurried up to Mabel's chamber. Then ensued an exciting scene. Lady Saxondale endeavoured to persuade Madge Somers that the original mark had strangely and unexpectedly taken this development: the mother knew not what to think—she scarcely believed the tale that was told her, and yet she did not know how to discredit it. Again and again did she study the mark and its exact nature—or rather its appearance, as artificially rendered: and thus it became indelibly impressed on her memory. She vowed that she would have her child again—that she repented of the bargain—that it was an unnatural one, which she could not be compelled to keep—although she admitted having squandered away in dissipation the greater portion of the gold she had received. Lady Saxondale offered larger bribes to induce the woman to adhere to her original compact; and after considerable difficulty, Madge Somers assented to her ladyship's overtures. She went away with five hundred pounds in her pocket; and the next morning Lady Saxondale intimated to the Ferneys that urgent business, connected with the fictitious Chancery suit, compelled her at once to leave for the country.

She did not however choose to say that she never intended to return to her lodgings—though she whispered to the widow, when the son was not by, that if she did not come to retake possession of them in a month, her lease might be considered to be abandoned. Ferney himself was overwhelmed with affliction at the prospect of this abrupt separation: but to him she whispered with a tender smile, that she should return shortly. She begged his acceptance of a splendid diamond-ring: and he, scarcely knowing what memorial to give in return, thought that nothing could be more suitable than the results of some of the delicate and difficult experiments in which she had taken so much interest. With characteristic simplicity, he presented to her a phial of chloroform, together with a small casket filled with elegantly cut little bottles, containing delicious perfumes. Lady Saxondale and Mabel returned into Lincolnshire with the child; and they reached the castle to find the old lord dead, and to learn that Ralph Farefield had just arrived.

The reader is aware of the circumstances under which Lady Saxondale and Ralph Farefield met. The child was displayed, with the mark upon its neck; and Ralph was at once smitten with the

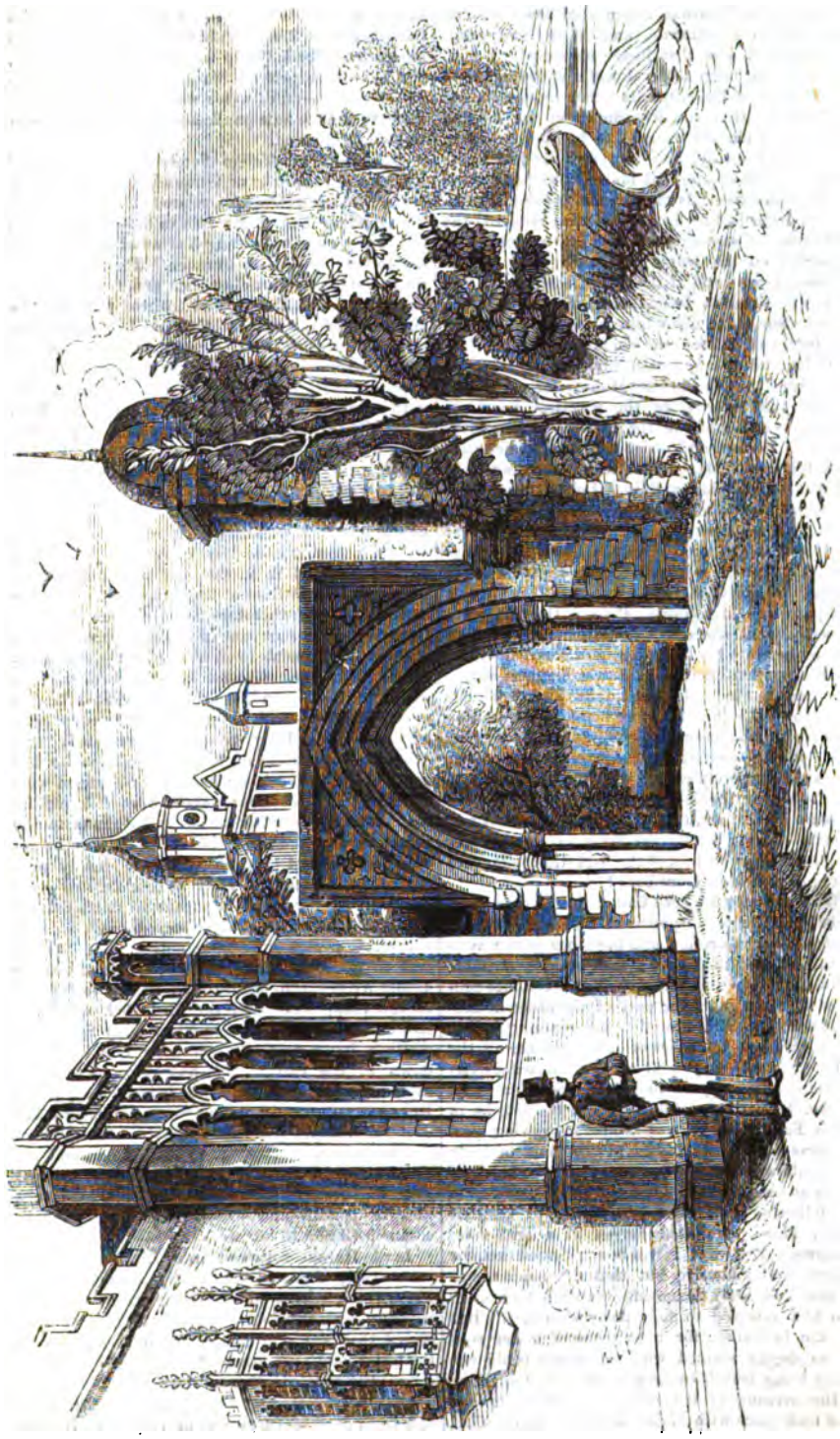
conviction that Chiffin had deceived him in his assertion that the infant heir of Saxondale had been made away with. The reader will recollect that her ladyship led Ralph Farefield into a window-recess—and there, pretending to have some sympathy for him, she made an appointment to meet him at eleven o'clock on the same night in the chapel. The fact was, that notwithstanding all her previous self-reasonings in respect to the certainty of outwitting Farefield, she was afraid of him. She knew him to be a desperate man; and as he was now placed in desperate circumstances, she felt that she was not safe so long as he remained in existence. The supposititious child which had already cost her so much anxiety and trouble, might be cunningly and treacherously made away with; and then adieu to all her grand schemes, her towering hopes, and her lofty projects! She had consummated a tremendous imposture: she now felt that it was necessary to ensure it by an additional crime. Her heart had become hardened—her soul indurated—her conscience blunted, against all compunction and remorse; and it was Ralph Farefield's death which was required to consolidate the position she had been at such pains to build up.

She met him in the chapel: she told him a tale of a treasure being concealed in the vault. He was desperate; and any straw flung out to him, was a hope to save him from drowning in the vortex of despair. Besides, though he himself was vile and so capable of iniquity, he could not possibly think that the beautiful Lady Saxondale was equally wicked. It was with an air of ingenuous frankness that she had told him of twenty thousand pounds being in the vault,—of which he himself was to take five: but in his own mind he resolved to self-appropriate the entire sum. He found, however, that she had taken her precautions against any sudden attack which vindictiveness might urge him to make upon her—and that there was a witness to the entire proceeding: for when bidden to look forth from the chapel-door, he beheld Mabel in the corridor. Then he knew that if he attempted violence to retain the entire treasure, an alarm could be raised; and he was constrained to make up his mind to content himself with the portion she had promised. In obedience to Lady Saxondale's instructions, he began to descend the steps leading into the vault,—she following him. But all in a moment her arm was stretched forth—a kerchief was applied to his nostrils—he inhaled the fatal chloroform, and fell headlong into the water which flooded the place. There he was drowned.

It happened that almost immediately after the departure of Lady Saxondale and Mabel, with the child, from London, business suddenly compelled Mr. Ferney to proceed to Gainsborough—a town he had never visited before; nor indeed was he ever previously in that part of the country at all. Little did he suspect that he was only within a few miles of the Mrs. Smith who had captivated his heart, and who was in reality the now widowed Lady Saxondale: and little, too, on the other hand, did Lady Saxondale herself fancy for a single moment that the surgeon on whom she had practised her wiles, was for the time being so near a neighbour. He became possessed of the body of Ralph Farefield in the way described in an earlier chapter of this narrative: and immediately returning to London, never visited Lincolnshire again until many long years had elapsed, and he had risen to the highest eminence in his profession.

And years and years too must now be passed over in this chapter of explanations,—the leap taking us from the middle of 1825 to the middle of 1844. The next incident we have to note was the meeting of Madge Somers with her son, after a separation of nineteen years. During that interval she had passed through the depravities of an abandoned life,—so that when she was first introduced to the reader in our opening chapters, she had become the companion and the accomplice of such villains as Chiffin the Cannibal and the rest of the gang whose head-quarters were at the public-house in Agar Town. It will be recollected how Edmund fell in with her at the cottage near the Seven Sisters' Road, when he was in search of Angela Vivaldi. She laid a plot with Chiffin for his assassination while he slept: but just as she was about to plunge her knife into his breast, she caught sight of the mark upon his neck. She knew him to be her son: for that mark was indelibly impressed upon her memory. His features, too—though he was now a young man—were precisely what she could fancy the infantile face would have grown into. There was no doubt it was her own son whom she had meant to immolate! We need not recapitulate the means she adopted to get him safe out of the house, and save him from an otherwise certain death at the hand of Chiffin. When he was gone, she recollected that Chiffin had exhibited a strange surprise when she had mentioned to him that the intended victim was Lord Saxondale. She had just discovered that he who bore the name of Lord Saxondale was none other than her own offspring; and she therefore became anxious to learn why that name should have in any way interested the Cannibal. By means of brandy-and-water she drew the ruffian out—and learnt from him how he had been engaged long years back to steal and to make away with the rightful heir of Saxondale, but how the child had been left amongst gipsies. The very next night Madge Somers proceeded to Saxondale House in Park Lane,—a night on which its noble mistress gave a grand banquet. Lady Saxondale knew her in a moment—though time and dissipation, depravity and iniquity, had traced upon her countenance those strong lines which were not there when long years back she had surrendered up her child. Madge bluntly told her ladyship that she now comprehended everything; and she received a considerable sum of money as a bribe to keep the secret. With a portion of that money she fulfilled a promise made to Chiffin, of indemnifying him for the loss sustained by the failure of the previous night's enterprise.

The reader does not require to be reminded that Dr. Ferney cherished the passion which he had conceived for Lady Saxondale when she lodged at his mother's house. Nineteen years passed away since that date: the widow Ferney went down to the grave—and the surgeon became a physician—removed from the moderate-sized house and simply respectable neighbourhood at Islington, to the large mansion in the fashionable quarter of Hanover Square. Throughout those nineteen years had Ferney retained the image of the beauteous



EDENBRIDGE PARK.

woman impressed upon his heart: and though his infatuation had become attempered down into an endeared, an affectionate, and an undying reminiscence, still was that image cherished by him. For all this long interval nothing occurred to strengthen the dim suspicion which he entertained at the time that the Mrs. Smith of the lodging was other than she seemed to be: but when he thought of the child and the mark he had made upon its shoulder, he did his best to banish the circumstance from his memory, in vague and mysterious dread lest he had indeed been rendered the accomplice of something more than a mere passing whim on the lady's part. So went by the nineteen years; and at the end of this long period he was destined to behold the object of his love again. She called upon him in terror relative to the bottle of chloroform which Chiffin the Cannibal had taken away with him on the night of the burglary at Saxondale House: for we should observe that ever since the practical use Lady Saxondale had made of the chloroform presented to her by Ferney, and which had cleared her path of Ralph Farefield, she had taken care not to be without so valuable a fluid. Being possessed of the secret how to eliminate it, she was enabled to profit by the instructions received from Ferney at the time she was a lodger in the house at Islington. But, as we were saying, they met after an interval of nineteen years; and Lady Saxondale still passed as Mrs. Smith, though the physician suspected that she was something more. When he took her into his laboratory and showed her the phial of powerful poison which was his most recent experiment, the sudden thought flashed to her mind that it would be convenient for herself to possess it. She accordingly self-appropriated that phial, in the confusion of the crash of bottles which she purposely caused with the fringe of her shawl. From the laboratory she passed into the museum; and there, to her awful wonderment and dismay, did she behold the form of Ralph Farefield, looking as he looked the last time she ever saw him—nineteen years back!

We must now observe that for some time past, Mabel Stewart's disposition had considerably changed: her discretion and prudence gave way to fretfulness and ill-temper; she became irritable and dissatisfied—and her disagreeable conduct provoked ill feelings on the part of the other domestics, as well as of Edmund and the young ladies, which only had the effect of irritating her all the more. She was cognisant of two damnatory circumstances in respect to her mistress: namely, the secret relative to Edmund, and the murder of Ralph Farefield. It was Mabel's growing perverseness which had flashed to the mind of Lady Saxondale when she self-appropriated the bottle of poison at the physician's house. On the very next day following her mysterious visit to Conduit Street, Mabel exhibited herself in a light more outrageous than ever. It will be recollected that she was not merely abusive, but that she made use of threats; and Lady Saxondale was even then more than half resolved to make away with her. But still she hesitated: for notwithstanding her soul was so deeply stained with crime, she could not readily bring herself to the perpetration of another. In the evening of the same day on which that scene took place with Mabel, Madge Somers called again; and this time it was to insist that measures should be taken to stop the prosecution of the Cannibal and Tony Wilkins on account of the burglary. Her ladyship was compelled to submit, and likewise to present Madge with a farther supply of money—all of which was lost at the gaming-table in that female pandemonium which the vile woman frequented.

The visits of Madge Somers, the conduct of Mabel, the behaviour of Edmund, and divers other circumstances which were related at the time, were now goading Lady Saxondale to despair; and she felt that no possible strength of mind would enable her to bear up against so much. Therefore, when some days afterwards another scene with Mabel took place, and the woman insisted that all the domestics of the household should be formally instructed to show her the completest deference,—Lady Saxondale's mind was made up with reference to one whose existence upon earth was fraught with so much terror and danger in her eyes. That same night Mabel was poisoned with a drop of Dr. Ferney's fatal elimination.

The next incident which has to be noticed, is the visit paid by Juliana at night to Madge Somers. In a chance conversation with Edmund, she learnt, as will be remembered, a description of this woman, and it precisely tallied with that which she had already received from the lips of Frank Paton. She was at that time at daggers drawn with her mother, and was therefore most anxious to ascertain wherefore such an ill-looking person could visit Lady Saxondale, and what power she had acquired over her. Guided by the information received from Edmund, she set out—visited Madge at her cottage—and by pretending to come on a message from Lady Saxondale, gradually and skilfully wormed out of her enough to make her comprehend the tremendous secret connected with Edmund. These circumstances were followed by the visit of Lady Saxondale and Juliana to the castle in Lincolnshire. There, as it will be remembered, Lord Harold Staunton boldly propounded his plans to Lady Saxondale, and gave her to understand that he meant to make her his wife. She promised compliance,—though secretly cherishing a very different intention. Lord Harold was to go to London for the purpose of bribing Emily Archer into silence with regard to the tale of the masquerade and the duel: but no sooner had he taken his departure, when Lady Saxondale wrote a letter to Chiffin, desiring him to hasten down to the castle. She had resolved to make away with Lord Harold: but inasmuch as Mabel had died so recently and so suddenly beneath her roof in London, she feared that *another* sudden death so closely following on the former, and beneath the roof of another of her mansions, would lead to suspicion. She therefore discarded the idea of poison—and wrote, as just described, to summon Chiffin to her aid.

Lord Harold returned into Lincolnshire, and was closely followed by Emily Archer herself. From the interview which took place between her ladyship and the ballet-dancer, the former perceived that she was completely in the power of the latter, and that circumstances had thus raised up in her path another obstacle which must be cleared away. Having already made up her mind to a fresh deed of turpitude, in respect to Harold,

it required no great struggle with her conscience, and no severe battling against compunctious scruples, to transfer her murderous intent from the young nobleman to the ballet-dancer. With that devilish cunning, too, which was characteristic of her, she calculated that she might render Harold her instrument in her new design, and postpone for farther consideration whether she should marry him or not. Indeed, she almost began to think it would be better to make him her husband, as he had already become her paramour. She was not too old to be devoid of dread as to the consequences of the intrigue; and at all events she would secure, in the half infatuated, half selfish young nobleman, a permanent co-operator and accomplice in her numerous machinations. She broke her wishes to him in respect to Emily Archer—and by various representations, arts, and wiles, she bent him to her purpose. The plan was all arranged; and in order to place Harold in circumstances which might utterly avert suspicion after the enactment of the contemplated tragedy, the little scene was got up in respect to the apparent accident with Mr. Hawkshaw's thorough-bred. It will be remembered that the appointment with Emily Archer and her maid was arranged for between nine and ten o'clock in the evening of that same day,—the spot being midway between the castle and Gainsborough. Lady Saxondale retired from the drawing-room for about a quarter of an hour, on pretence of writing letters in the library: but in reality she repaired to the chamber occupied by Staunton, and where it was supposed he was stretched helplessly on his back in consequence of the accident. But, according to preconcerted arrangement, he was ready dressed for his expedition. He muffled himself in his cloak, so as to hide his countenance in case of meeting any one—and also in case the attack upon the intended victims should fail and he might have to fly to escape detection on their part. He was moreover provided with his pistols, each being double-barrelled, and every barrel loaded with a bullet. Then, aided by Lady Saxondale, he passed forth from the castle by means of a window in one of the tapestry-chambers, and the tree which grew against that casement.

A little later in the evening, when supper was served up, Florina suddenly intimated her intention of ascending to her brother's chamber, to inquire if he would partake of some refreshment. Lady Saxondale, knowing he could not as yet have possibly returned, was for an instant smitten with dismay at the threatened proceeding: but instantaneously recovering herself, she affably offered to accompany Florina. They proceeded to the chamber of the supposed invalid,—her ladyship, taking good care to be the first to reach the door; and affecting to listen on the threshold, she made a sign for Florina to remain where she was. Then she advanced on tip-toe to the couch, wherein she well knew she should find nobody; and hastening back to the young lady with every appearance of noiseless caution, assured her that her brother was sleeping. Thus did the wily woman extricate herself from an embarrassment which a few minutes before had appeared serious indeed. When the household retired to rest, she proceeded again to Harold's chamber—and this time found him there. The tragedy had been accomplished: one pistol had sufficed to do the deed,—each of the two barrels of that one weapon having sent forth a bullet with fatal effect. The masquerade-dress had been thrown into the river: but in his confusion and horror Harold had likewise flung in the pistol which had accomplished the double murder. The other weapon, which there had been no necessity to use, was restored to his pistol-case. From Harold's chamber Lady Saxondale proceeded to the chapel, which she was accustomed to visit on particular nights, in order to see if Chiffin had attended to her letter. She found him there; and from his lips heard the confirmation of Harold's tale of the tragedy. But she did not require the villain's services *now*, for the purpose which had originally induced her to write to him: instead of making away with Lord Harold, she had decided upon espousing him. She however engaged the Cannibal on that occasion, by the offer of an immense bribe, to rid her path of Mr. Gunthorpe and William Deveril—little suspecting at the instant that the former was a great nobleman, and the latter was her own son. Early on the following morning Lady Saxondale visited Harold's chamber again: for a thought had struck her, filling her mind with uneasiness. The clothes he had worn on the previous evening, were sure to be wet and might be stained with blood: these evidences of the crime must therefore be caused to disappear. It was as she suspected: those garments were in the condition she had foreseen. A bundle was therefore made of them; and from the window of the tapestry-chamber did she consign them to the depths of the Trent.

Emily Archer was no more: *that* obstacle was removed from her path:—but scarcely was this crime consummated, when another circumstance for the moment threatened Lady Saxondale with destruction. This was the sudden appearance of Dr. Ferney at the Castle,—Dr. Ferney, who now discovered who was the Mrs. Smith that he had so long known by no other name, but whom he at length found to be the brilliant Lady Saxondale! He came to inform her that the body of Mabel Stewart had been taken to his house, and that he had ascertained she had died by poison—that very poison the elimination of which was one of the results of his own experiments. It is however only necessary to glance at this circumstance for the purpose of reminding the reader how Lady Saxondale succeeded in overcoming the scruples of the physician, and rendering him pliant to her interests and ductile to her purposes once more.

Shortly after these occurrences, Madge Somers found her way into Lincolnshire. Her funds were exhausted—she required more money: and whence could she so readily or so easily obtain it as from the hands of Lady Saxondale? Having arrived at Gainsborough, she was on her way to the Castle, when she accidentally slipped into the river, and was gallantly rescued by William Deveril from a watery grave. They were both hospitably treated at the peasants' cottage. Madge, on recovering—and previous to taking her departure—was desirous to express her gratitude to the young gentleman whose magnanimous conduct had made a deep impression upon the woman's mind. But while she was seated with him in the chamber where he lay, he fainted through exhaustion: and then, to her infinite surprise, Madge beheld be-

tween his neck and his shoulder, a mark precisely similar to that which she knew to be on the person of her own son—the young man then passing as Lord Saxondale. It will be remembered that from the lips of Chiffin she had heard the entire story of how the rightful heir of Saxondale had been stolen in his infancy, and had been left amongst gipsies: she now therefore knew that in her deliverer from a watery grave she beheld that heir! She scrutinised his features—and she saw a sufficient resemblance between his countenance and that of Lady Saxondale, to corroborate her belief. When he awoke to consciousness, the facts she gleaned from him confirmed the idea—if any such confirmation were needed. The reader will remember with what solemn earnestness she adjured him to say whether he had listened favourably to Lady Saxondale's overtures of love; and likewise how strangely the ejaculation "Ah!" had come forth from her lips, when in the course of conversation he declared that he had never been within the walls of Saxondale Castle in all his life.

It appears to be a special decree of Providence that no nature shall ever become so completely brutalised but that it has at least one single glimmering of a better feeling left,—that no heart shall be rendered so utterly obdurate as not to have one single chord that may sooner or later vibrate with a kind sympathy. All this was illustrated in the case of Madge Somers. She owed her life to the young man who lay stretched before her eyes; and she was touched on his behalf. She saw that a tremendous wrong had been perpetrated, and that he was debarred of his just rights. Her conscience smote her for having surrendered up her own son to usurp the place which this young man ought to occupy; and there was even a sensation of solemn awe in her soul as the thought was forced upon her that heaven itself had sent this young man to deliver her from death, in order that by the awakening of her sympathies and her remorse, its own inscrutable purposes might be worked out in the bringing of him to the attainment and enjoyment of his own. Madge was a singular being; and her course was decisively taken. She at once saw that, without corroborative evidence, the bare assertion of William Deveril's claims to the estates and peerage of Saxondale, would be but of little avail—and that everything depended on the discovery of the man Thompson, who could tell more about him. For Deveril had been adopted as the child of those to whom he was evidently in no way related: he had regarded them as his parents: nothing had occurred to make him suspect the contrary; and as they were dead and gone, the evidence of one who might tell a different tale and show that he was *not* their son, was indispensably needful. Madge Somers was sanguine as well as persevering. She was resolved to search for the man Thompson, and to set out upon the enterprise with as much courage and spirit as ever did a warrior of other times embark upon a crusade to a far-off land.

This narrative of explanations is now drawing towards a close; and there remains only one incident to which attention need be specially directed. This was the consignment of Edmund as an alleged lunatic to the care of Dr. Ferney. It will be remembered that when Edmund was removed thither from the asylum of Dr. Burdett in the middle of the night, Dr. Ferney was left in ignorance until the very last moment of the name of the patient he was about to receive. This name was not mentioned to him until Dr. Burdett's keeper was hurriedly taking his leave; and the next moment the physician remained alone in the parlour with the young man who had been announced to him as Lord Saxondale. The mere mention of the name struck upon Ferney's heart as a remorse; and as he contemplated the bearer of that name, and saw that he possessed not the faintest resemblance to Lady Saxondale, strange suspicions began agitating in the physician's mind. Now for the first time did those thoughts of the past, which were dim, vague, and shapeless in respect to the mystery of the strawberry-mark—begin to develop themselves into consistency; and he shuddered within himself as he thought it possible that he could at length read the tremendous truth. Hence that anguished murmuring to himself of "My God! my God! if it should be so—and I have been instrumental——But no: it cannot be——But if not *that*, what *else*?"

Tortured by the horrified feelings thus excited within him, Ferney waited in feverish impatience until he thought Edmund was asleep in the room to which he was consigned; and thither did he stealthily repair. Edmund *did* sleep; and the physician, unfastening his night-garments, examined his shoulder. Yes—his suspicion was confirmed: *there* was the mark which his own hand had made! On the following day he called in a half-distracted state of mind upon Lady Saxondale: but again did the wily woman succeed in over-ruling all his compunctions and conquering all his scruples.

The reader knows the rest—not forgetting the murder of Adelaide, Edmund's wife;—and it is therefore useless to have recourse to any additional recapitulation. It will however be perceived that *all* the details which have been given in this chapter, could not have emanated entirely from the lips of Lady Saxondale when she lay upon her death-bed, and when her confession was made to the Marquis of Eagledean. But those facts which were deficient in her own narrative, were either already within his lordship's knowledge, or the range of his conjecture—or else were subsequently revealed by Ferney: so that no incident was wanting to afford in due time a complete reading of all the mysteries of the past.

Lady Saxondale died in the evening of the same day on which her confession was made; and let us hope that the repentance which she expressed, was sincere. It was not until several days afterwards that it was deemed prudent to break the intelligence of her decease to her son, Lord Saxondale: but though for a few hours it plunged him into a relapse, yet this was succeeded by a development of energy arising from a sense of the last duty which he had to perform towards his parent. Forgotten was everything in the shape of injury that he had sustained at her hands: he thought of her only with mingled love and grief: he followed her remains to the tomb—and the tears which he shed over her coffin, were as full of anguish as if it were the best, the kindest, and the most virtuous of mothers whose loss was thus deplored.

CHAPTER CLXXIV.

A NIGHT IN FRANCE.

It was about ten days after the tragic incidents at Saxondale House in Park Lane, and between eight and nine o'clock in the evening, that an ill-looking man, very indifferently dressed, entered a small wine-shop in the little town of Vairan, situate midway between Lyons and Grenoble. He passed into a room devoted for the accommodation of wayfarers and customers; and in wretchedly broken French, called for some brandy and something to eat. The French waiter looked at the fellow with a very evil eye, as if he thought that he was scarcely capable of paying even the moderate expense to be incurred for his refreshments—or at all events that his appearance was of so suspicious a nature the establishment could very well do without such a patron. The man,—whose countenance was of a most hang-dog description, and the fierceness of which was enhanced by a dark beard of three or four days' growth,—scowled terribly upon the waiter; and tossing down a couple of francs, growlingly muttered a frightful imprecation in English,—adding in his broken French, "Take your money, and give me the change."

The waiter, though still with some degree of reluctance, quitted the room to fetch what the man had ordered—and presently returned therewith. The fellow was in the midst of his repast,—moistening his bread and meat with a frequent draught of brandy-and-water,—when the door of the room opened; and another English wayfarer entered, whose appearance was scarcely more commendable than that of the other. He was dressed like a decayed groom or coachman—but had altogether so savage an expression of countenance that it was difficult to suppose he could have recently been in any gentleman's service in either of those capacities. The man who had first entered, raised his eyes from the meal before him; and when his looks encountered those of the newcomer, they both started with the suddenness of mutual recognition, and grim smiles of satisfaction and astonishment appeared upon their countenances.

"What, Chiffin, old feller?" ejaculated the one who had last entered: and he thrust forth his hand.

"Yes—it's me, Mat," responded the Cannibal, laying down his food and grasping the Cadger's outstretched hand. "It's no other than the famous Mr. Chiffin, Esquire, that you see before you."

"And uncommon sorry I am to see Mr. Chiffin in no better plight," answered Mat, surveying the Cannibal's seedy apparel and dirty, unkempt, unshaven appearance.

"Well, I can't say," growled the latter, "that I can pay you any better compliment. Things have gone precious hard with me for some time past——"

"And with me too," rejoined Mat the Cadger; "particularly since I come into this devil of a country where I can't speak a sentence of the lingo."

But here the conversation was temporarily cut short by the entrance of the waiter, bearing some refreshment which Mat the Cadger had ordered as he passed the bar,—his knowledge of the French tongue being confined to the half-dozen words expressing the articles which he most generally needed—such as bread, meat, brandy, cheese, tobacco, &c. The waiter, whose suspicions had been excited by the appearance of Chiffin, had certainly but little cause to be moved in his favour, when he perceived that he had found a companion—perhaps a friend, and perhaps an accomplice—in the almost equally ill-looking rascal who had last entered. It naturally occurred to the man that the meeting of these two—both being Englishmen, and both being of an evil aspect—was not so accidental as it seemed and as in truth it was: but the thought struck him that they had met at the wine-shop to concoct some villany. Therefore, upon leaving the room, he mentioned his suspicions to the master of the establishment; and this individual thought it prudent to send an intimation to the gendarmes in the town, to the effect that two very ill-looking foreigners were at the moment beneath his roof.

Meanwhile Chiffin and Mat the Cadger were discussing their refreshments and continuing their discourse.

"Why, it must be a matter of pretty near eighteen months—at all events fifteen or sixteen," said the Cannibal, "since you and me separated on that night when we were so preciously sold in endeavouring to carry off Madge Somers. You jumped out of the window——"

"The best thing I could do," replied Mat. "But what did they do with you? for you never turned up afterwards."

"What did they do?" growled Chiffin: "why, they didn't behave unhandsome, I must say, considering all circumstances. They packed me off to France; and when I was safe landed at Calais, I had thirty pounds put into my hand. Now you must know that Lord Eagledean had sent to America some time before that, to order a good sum of money to be paid to me if I presented myself in person to receive it. So I was resolved to go over to New York and take possession of the blunt. Well, I got as far as Havre-de-Grace—a place where the packets sail from for America. I took my berth, as a steerage passenger; and as the ship wasn't going to sail for three or four days, I thought I would amuse myself by looking about the town."

"And so you got into some scrape," interjected Mat; "I'll be bound!"

"By Satan, you are just right there!" growled the Cannibal, with a fearfully gloomy look: "and the worse luck for me too. I got blazing drunk at a wine-shop—kicked up a diabolic row—smashed three or four Frenchmen almost to bits—was took before the magistrate—and got sent to quod for six months. There was a pretty start!—or I should say it wasn't any start at all: for the ship sailed without me, as a matter of course—and my passage-money was forfeited."

"Well, that was a misfortune," observed the Cadger, as he emptied his glass.

"So I come out of gaol with only about twenty francs in my pocket," resumed the Cannibal; "and what was I to do? I knowed it was no use to write to Lord Eagledean and ask for more money:

he had quite enough reason to be sick and tired of me. But I did write to Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton—and got no answer. I suppose they thought fit to cut their old acquaintance when he was in trouble."

"Very likely," said Mat. "But what have you been doing ever since you came out of gaol?"

"Leading a life that would be hard to give an exact account of," answered the Cannibal;—"wandering about like a lost dog—aye, and like a half-starved one too, sometimes—doing a bit of prigging here and highway robbery there—having a precious lot of very narrow escapes—and in short, dragging on such an existence that I'm uncommon tired of it. Ah! what a fool I have been! The money I have had! the use I might have made of my noble patrons!"—and in desperation the Cannibal dashed his clenched fist forcibly upon the table.

"Well, I can't tell of better things," observed the Cadger. "England got too hot to hold me; and so about a month ago I came over to France. I had a trifle of money with me; and so as yet I hav'n't been forced to do anything queer in this country. I meant to get on into Italy, where there's a gentleman I had some claim upon a good many years ago; and as he keeps a lot of horses and dogs, I have been thinking he might take me into his service—particularly as he has been too long abroad to know anything to my discredit. But my funds fell short at Lyons; and so I am forced to make up my mind to do the best I can to get on to Florence—which is where the gentleman is. I have walked every bit of the way from Calais to this place—and have taken a month to do it."

"And now," asked the Cannibal, "how much money have you got in your pocket?"

"Not more than enough to pay for what I have had here, and my bed. To-morrow morning I shall go upon the tramp without a *sou* left."

"And that's exactly my case," rejoined the Cannibal. "What's to be done? For I suppose that now chance has flung us together, we sha'n't separate in a hurry."

"Not if there's any good to be got by keeping with each other," rejoined Mat the Cadger.

"Why, if I had only a pal to work with, I shouldn't be as I am," proceeded Chiffin. "There's plenty of travellers on all the roads: but it isn't an easy thing for a fellow single-handed to stop a carriage or chaise. It's even dangerous to tackle a man when he's alone in a gig: for he may have pistols about him—and I have got none. Now, Mat—what do you say? Shall you and me work together?"

"It seems as if it was all arranged beforehand," answered the Cadger: "or else why did destiny fling us together? Yes, Chiffin—I will work with you."

Here the landlord entered the room; and pretending to look about for something, surveyed his two customers in a manner which not only showed them how little welcome they were — but implied as plainly as looks could do, that if they had finished their meals he would rather have their room than their company. They did not however immediately choose to take the hint: and so he retired.

"Now, old feller," said Mat the Cadger, "I suppose you know what *that* means? We can't have beds here: they don't like the looks of us—and it's not the first time, since I have been in France, that my appearance has told against me."

"Well, it isn't a very handsome one," observed the Cannibal: "neither is mine, for that matter. But as we can't stay here, let's toddle; and as we have agreed to work together, let's make a beginning to-night. Perhaps we shall get something worth having; and to-morrow shall be able to enjoy ourselves with a good booze for old acquaintance' sake. What say you?"

"With all my heart," replied Mat the Cadger. "I am a trifle tired or so, after a walk of twenty-five miles to-day from half-way to Lyons: but if there's anything to be got, I am not the chap to give way to fatigue."

"Then come," said the Cannibal: and aware that he and his friend were regarded with suspicion by the landlord, he concealed his club underneath his coat, which he buttoned over his chest.

The two villains, having settled their score, issued forth from the wine-shop; and quitting the town of Vairan, they continued on the road to Genoble. It was now about ten o'clock: the moon was shining bright—it was a delicious evening—and all objects were plainly visible. They went on, conversing together—but stopping every now and then to listen whether they could hear the sounds of any approaching equipage: for they were resolved, if circumstances should appear favourable, to commence their partnership operations without delay. An hour passed; and they encountered only a few poor wayfarers, who did not present an appearance which rendered it worth while to run any risk by attacking them. Chiffin had his club in readiness for action: Mat the Cadger had likewise a good stout stick; and these weapons were formidable enough in the hands of such desperate characters.

Presently they heard the sounds of an equipage approaching from behind. They stopped and listened; and as it drew nearer, their experienced ears made them aware that it was a vehicle drawn by two horses.

"The very thing!" muttered Chiffin: "there will be only one postilion. You make a dash at him—and leave me to deal with anybody else that there may be."

"All right!" responded Mat. "There's nothing like settling our duties beforehand:"—then as the equipage came in sight, he added quickly, "Yes—it's a pair!"

"And no one on the box!" immediately observed Chiffin. "A light *calèche* too—not more than two travellers inside, I'll be bound. Let's walk slowly on, and seem to be talking, as if we didn't mean mischief."

The chaise came up: the animals were jogging along at the usually miserable pace at which post horses are accustomed to proceed on the French roads; and the postilion, with his great heavy boots, was sitting comfortably enough in his saddle, totally unsuspicious of impending mischief. All in an instant Mat the Cadger sprang at the horse's heads—clutched the reins with one hand—and with the club which he held in the other, struck down the postilion. But the Frenchman was not stunned; and instantaneously springing to

his feet, he resolutely and valiantly grappled with the Cadger.

Meanwhile Chiffin had flown to the door of the *calesche:* but just as he tore it open, the traveller inside—for it contained only one gentleman—fired a pistol; and the bullet whisked by the Cannibal's ear. Fearing that there might be a second pistol in readiness, Chiffin threw himself upon the traveller—tore him out of the chaise with the force and fury of a wild beast—and hurled him to the ground. At the same moment the horses, frightened by the disturbance, dashed away; and the hind-wheel of the chaise went completely over the traveller's neck,—breaking it, so that death was instantaneous.

The horses dashed on; and as the chaise passed away, the shadow which it had thrown upon the ground, disappeared as suddenly from the spot: so that the clear moonlight now streamed full upon the face of the dead traveller. An ejaculation of astonishment burst from the lips of Chiffin: for in that traveller he at once recognised Lord Harold Staunton!

At the same moment the galloping sounds of horses' hoofs were heard approaching from the direction of Vairan; and Chiffin flew to the assistance of his comrade, Mat the Cadger, whom the French postilion had flung upon the ground, and on whose breast his knee was placed. The Cannibal's club dealt the unfortunate post-boy such a tremendous blow as to dash out his brains; and he fell dead upon the spot. The next instant the two ruffians had leapt the hedge which skirted the road, and were flying across the adjacent field. But the comers on horseback,—who, indeed, consisted of a posse of gendarmes,—were not to be thus baulked. They gallantly leapt the hedge, and dashed across the meadow in pursuit of the fugitives.

"We are done for, Mat!" exclaimed Chiffin. "It's the guillotine—or else a resistance unto death!"

"Resistance!" echoed the desperate Cadger: and like two wild beasts at bay, they turned to face the gendarmes.

These,—who were half-a-dosen in number,—called upon them to surrender: but the only answer was a furious attack made by the villains; for they were goaded to mingled frenzy and despair, and they literally sought death. One officer was struck to the ground by a blow of Chiffin's club—another had his arm broken by the Cadger's cudgel: the others closed in around them. But still the two desperate men fought with a valour worthy of a better cause,—until Mat was stricken dead with a blow of a cutlass—and a bullet through the brain ended the iniquitous career of Chiffin the Cannibal.

Lord Harold Staunton's passport told who he was: the report of his death was published in the newspapers, and through this channel shortly came to the knowledge of the Marquis of Eagledean,—who, though he deplored the fate of a young man cut off ere he had time to repent of his manifold sins, was nevertheless relieved from the apprehension of being succeeded in his title and estates by one whose soul was stained with the crime of murder.

CONCLUSION.

No difficulty was experienced in making good the claims of our hero to the title and estates of Saxondale. The subject of those claims was duly investigated by a Commitee of Privileges appointed by the House of Lords,—the principal deponents being the Marquis of Eagledean, Dr. Ferney, and Mr. Thompson. The Marquis, while giving his evidence, merely recited so much of the late Lady Saxondale's confession as had immediate reference to the question under investigation: her deeper and darker crimes he kept entirely out of view. Dr. Ferney—spirit-broken and crushed, not merely by the recollections of the past, but also by the recent horrors which had occurred at Saxondale House—presented but the ghost of his former self; so that his appearance, and the tale of love's infatuation which he told, won for him a considerable amount of sympathy. As there was not any ground to believe him culpable of a conscious and wilful complicity in the initiation of the imposture twenty-one years back,—but as it was only too evident that his passion had rendered him the weak tool of an artful and designing woman,—moreover, as it was through his instrumentality that this imposture was suddenly blazoned forth to the whole world,—it entered not into the mind of any one to proclaim him worthy of punishment. When the judgment of the Committee was pronounced, and Lord Saxondale was invited to take his seat amongst the Peers of England—Dr. Ferney, having done all that was required of him, resolved to withdraw completely into private life. He gave up his profession—he quitted his house in Conduit Street—and he retired to the picturesque dwelling at Rhavadergwy in Wales, which the Marquis and Marchioness of Eagledean placed at his disposal. Thither he was accompanied by the faithful and attached Thompson,—on whom Lord Saxondale settled an annuity, so as to relieve him from a complete state of dependence on the physician. No museum, and no laboratory were established at Rhavadergwy: Dr. Ferney had conceived a sudden and unconquerable disgust for all those circumstances and pursuits which could not fail to remind him vividly of the past; and it was in the recreations of literature that the remainder of his days were spent. He lived but three or four years after the occurrences at Saxondale House: his health gradually declined—his constitution, never strong, gave way—and he expired in the arms of the attached Thompson.

The full extent of Lady Saxondale's crimes, as well as those of Lord Harold Staunton, was religiously concealed from our hero and the beauteous Florina. Indeed Lord and Lady Saxondale are now completely happy: their grief for the loss, the one of a mother, the other of a brother, gradually became attempered down to a pious resignation—until it was absorbed in the elements of felicity with which they were so profusely surrounded. They have four children—two sons and two daughters,—constituting the chief source of their happiness, and in whom are reflected the manly beauty of their father and the feminine graces of their mother.

The Marquis of Eagledean is now in his seventieth year, but as hale and as hearty as when we

first introduced him to the reader. There being no heir to his title, the entail of his estates ceases, and he is enabled to bequeath them to whomsoever he chooses. Lord and Lady Saxondale, being already immensely rich, require nothing at the old nobleman's hands: it is the same with Lord and Lady Everton—the same too with the Count and Countess of Christoval; and therefore the bulk of the Marquis's property is willed to Mr. and Mrs. Paton, a munificent jointure being reserved for the Marchioness. All those personages whose names have just been mentioned, are as happy as the reader can wish them to be;—and, beyond those petty evils which are incidental to even the most prosperous human condition, no cloud threatens to cast its shadow upon the tenour of their existence.

Juliana—fortunately for herself—became subjected to influences alike corrective and beneficent, when the terrific drama developed its mingled phases of wonderment and horror at Saxondale House. The vigils which she kept by her mother's bedside until almost the last moment, impressed upon her mind the terrors of that death-bed to which guilt had brought her parent; and she was led to deplore her own frailties. Then, on the rightful Lord Saxondale's recovery from his illness, she found herself clasped in the arms of a brother,—a brother who was prepared to receive her as his sister, and to treat her with all the kindness which was characteristic of his nature. The period of mourning for the deceased Lady Saxondale was passed by Juliana at the mansion in Park Lane, with her brother and her sister-in-law; and as it drew towards an end, she received a note from Mr. Forester, respectfully and affectionately worded, soliciting an interview. This she declined, in the belief that he was desirous of drawing her into a renewal of that connexion which had been cut short by the tragic circumstances at Saxondale House. A few months elapsed, during which Juliana heard no more of Mr. Forester; but at the expiration of that interval, she received a second note, assuring her that the impression her image had left upon his mind, was stronger than he had at first fancied—and he offered her his hand. This she accepted; and her brother, Lord Saxondale, settled upon her an annuity of fifteen hundred a year; so that it proved by no means an ineligible match, in a worldly point of view, for Mr. Forester. But inasmuch as Juliana's character had been too much damaged for her to hope speedily to regain her footing in English society, she and her husband have since their marriage resided abroad—chiefly in Italy; and we are happy in being enabled to add that the lady's conduct has been perfectly and scrupulously correct.

It may easily be supposed that the Marchioness of Villebelle—the beautiful Constance—was perfectly astounded when she learnt that the deceased Edmund was not her brother, but that he whom she had known as William Deveril, stood in this light towards her: and mingled with that wonderment was a profound affliction at the tragic end of her mother. Her husband continued to fill eminent diplomatic situations throughout the reign of Louis-Philippe, and likewise while the Republic lasted: but when Louis Napoleon usurped the Imperial Crown of France, the high-minded Marquis refused to serve under the new dynasty. Fortunately for him, a very distant relative—whom he had not seen and scarcely known for years—died about the same time of that usurpation; and the Marquis found himself the heir to a large fortune. From motives of delicacy,—being unwilling to meet his former wife, if wife she could be called—the Countess of Christoval,—he has visited England rarely; indeed, only for a few weeks at a time, to enable Constance to see her brother and sister-in-law; and now the Marquis and Marchioness are settled down on the handsome estate in the South of France, which formed a portion of his recently acquired inheritance.

We must not forget to observe that Mary-Anne—Constance's faithful lady's-maid—formed an excellent matrimonial alliance. She was one morning combing out her long luxuriant hair before a glass placed on a toilet-table near the window of her chamber at the mansion of the French Embassy in Madrid,—when she unconsciously became the object of admiration on the part of a middle-aged English gentleman who was lodging at an hotel on the opposite side of the street. The admirer was a bachelor, with a moderate fortune; and he longed for the bliss of matrimony. He soon contrived to form an acquaintance with Mary-Anne—he wooed and won her—and the marriage has been a perfectly happy one, notwithstanding the disparity of some sixteen or seventeen years in their respective ages.

Lord Petersfield paid the debt of nature a few months after the incidents at Saxondale House. He had to be examined as a witness in a law-suit which came under the cognizance of the Court of Queen's Bench; and it is supposed that the exceeding home-thrust questions which the learned counsel put, and which compelled him for once in his life to give point-blank answers, appeared to his mind so utterly destructive of that diplomatic reserve which had become habitual, and so completely subversive of his solemn gravity, as altogether to upset him; and unable to bear up against the shock, he took to his bed—which he never left alive.

Squire Hawkshaw continues unmarried, and is likely to remain so. He is an occasional visitor at the houses of those friends with whom circumstances rendered him so intimate; and he is always a welcome guest.

A few years back, a certain Mark Bellamy was convicted of forgery, before a criminal tribunal at Vienna, and was sentenced to work in the Austrian quicksilver-mines for the remainder of his life. About the same time, Mrs. Martin—another creature of the late Lord Everton, the uncle and persecutor of the present one—died in wretchedness in an English workhouse.

We have now no more to relate. Our task, so far as the present narrative is concerned, has reached its termination. But ere laying down our pen, we invite the attention of our myriads of readers to a Fourth and Concluding Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF THE COURT OF LONDON."

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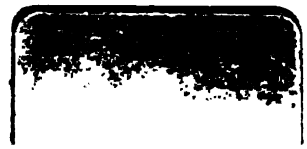
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